FEBRUARY 20th ISSUE, 1925
VOL. LI No. 2

ADVENTURE

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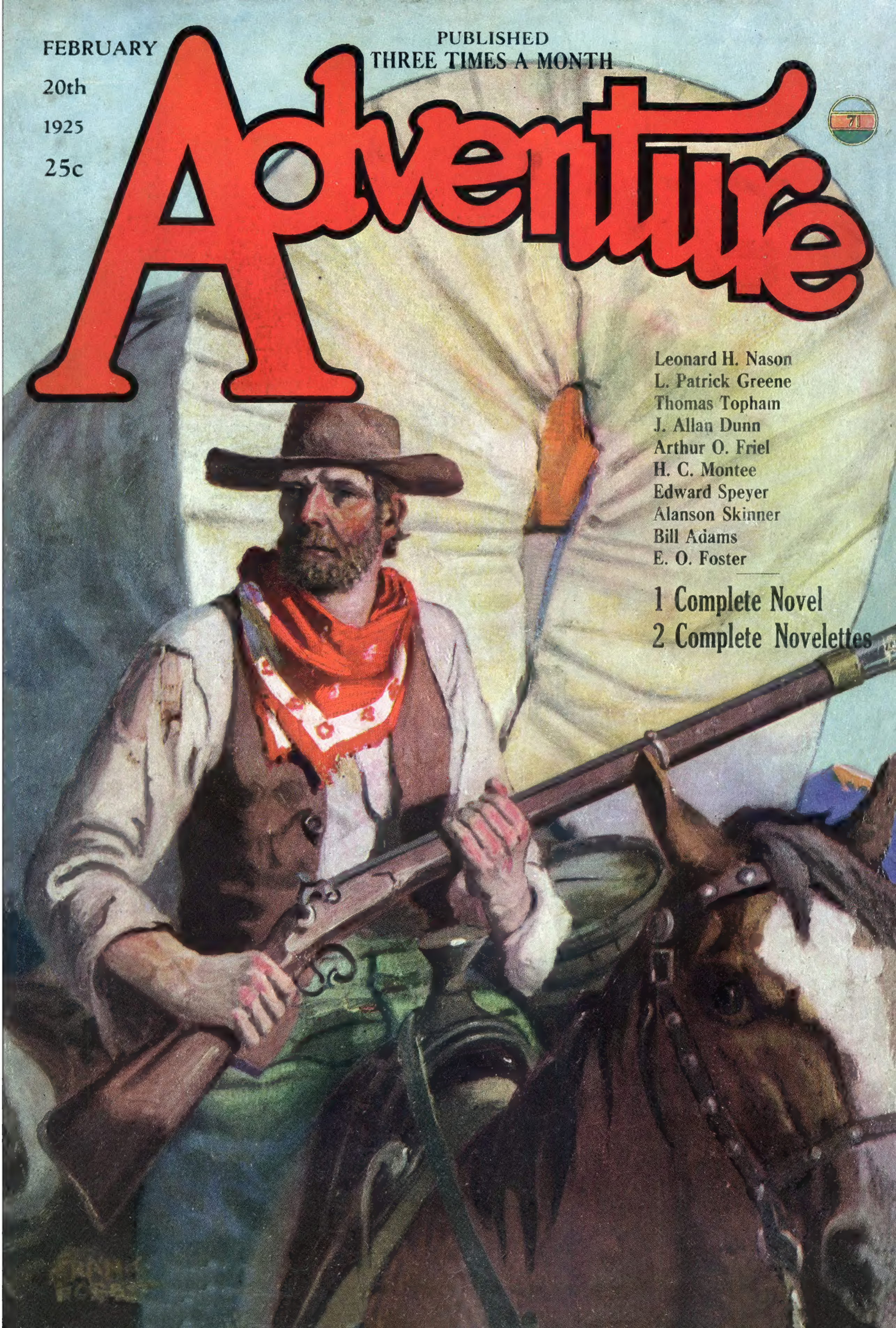

FEBRUARY
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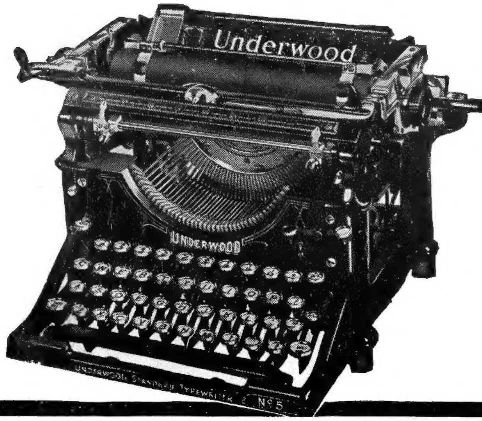

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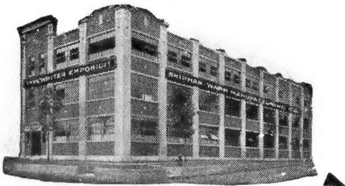

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Feb. 20th, 1925

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Volume 51
Number 2

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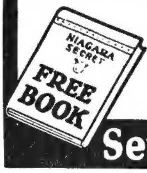
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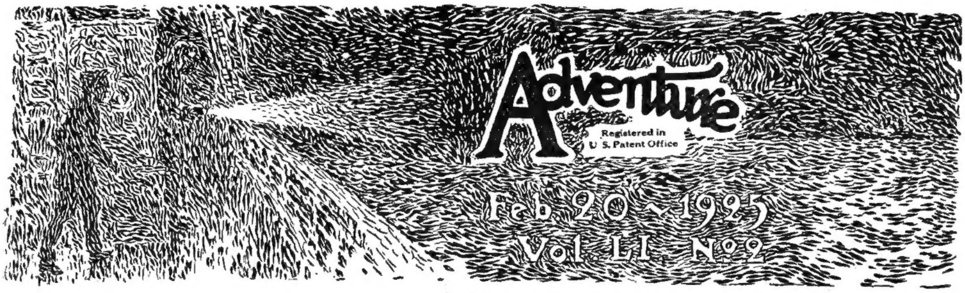

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Headings . . . . **Will Crawford**

Cover Design . . . . **F. C. Herbst**

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IT WAS in the eventful year of 1687 that the French set out from forest-hemmed Ontario to conquer the Iroquois and wrest New York Province from the English. And *Carcajou*, an outlaw among his own French people, was depended on for help. "THE BUSH LOPERS," a five-part serial by Hugh Pendexter, begins in the next issue.

"AND who but a white man—or very few of us Japanese—can do what this white man is about to do?" asked *Takagawa*. "THE SCARECROW," a novelette by Sidney Herschel Small, is complete in the next issue.

"LAME Duck. That's me," cried *Wilson*. "I never had anything yet that wasn't a blasted lame duck!" "IN GHOST CAÑON," a complete novelette of prospecting in the West, by James Sharp Eldredge, is in the next issue.

THE old man's lips were sealed; even the threat of torture and death could not make him divulge his plans. In the next issue is "THE SECRET OF TIMOR LAUT," a complete novelette of the South Seas by Frederick Moore.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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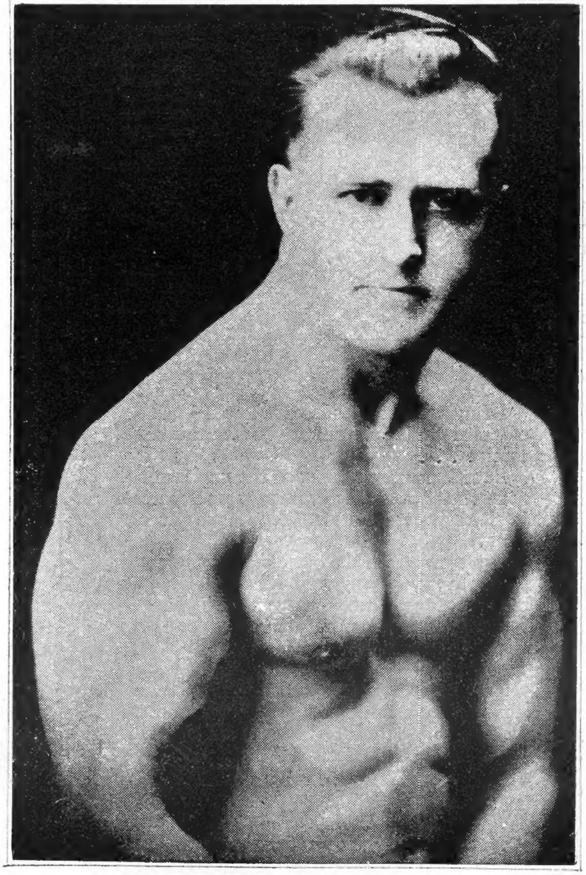

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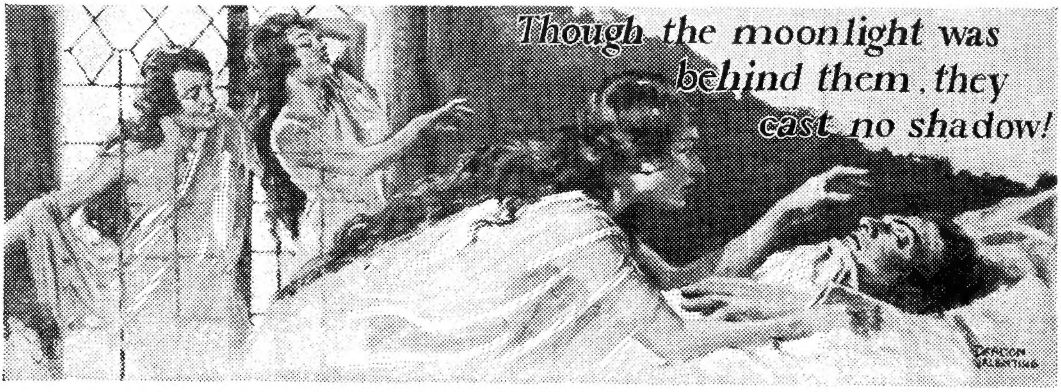
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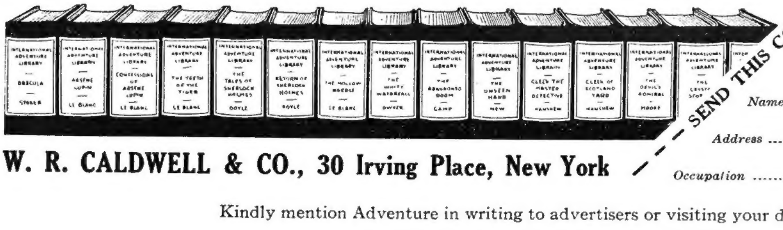

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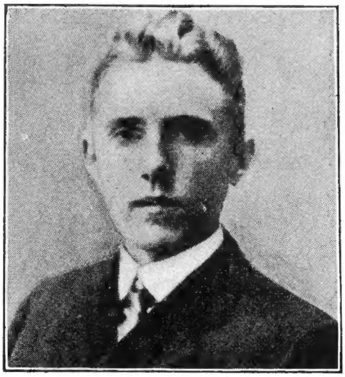

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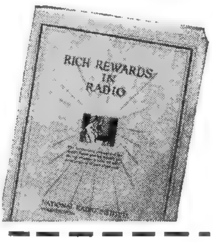

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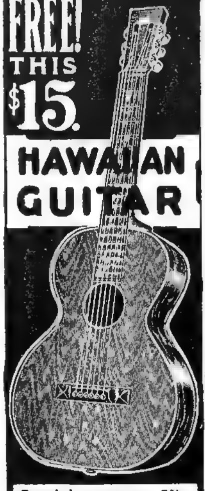

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Bride and Groom!

[*By* William R. Durgin]

DECEMBER and May! Once I would have condemned any mating of age with youth. Yet a month ago I was best man for my old friend Col. Bemis—and "old" friend he is, for the colonel is in his fifty-eighth year—and his petite bride who then lacked a few days of being twenty!

There isn't a happier couple in the state; their happiness is apparent to all observers. But I wonder what others would think if they had seen Col. Bemis as I saw him less than a year ago—before he had taken the big brace that two physicians said a man of his age could never take!

Bemis had let-up and slowed-down; he had become a mere spectator in life's race—when something happened.

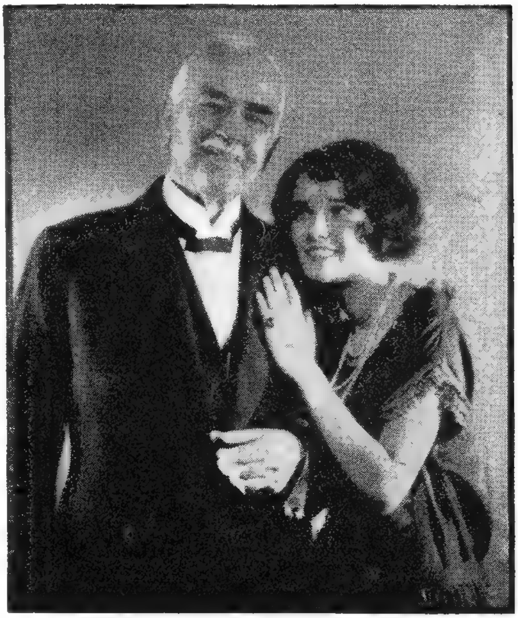
The remarkable means by which this man regained an almost youthful energy should interest any man who has lost even part of his normal capacity for work and play. This is the story:

Did you ever hear of Spine Motion? Neither did I until two years ago. Neither did Col. Bemis until less than a year ago. But within a *month* Spine Motion moved him up several notches, physically, and his energies have been on the rise ever since. This simple but unusual principle of revitalization has to do, as the name implies, with the *spine*. It seems that settling of the spine accounts for many of the nervous disorders that age the body; and the slightest elongation of a "settled" spine is often all that's needed to restore abounding energies and endurance. When Hobart Bradstreet discovered Spine Motion he gave us men past the forty mark a ten or twenty year renewal on our lease of *active* life! Here's how it works:

Let's assume you start Spine Motion today; you take one motion only, it takes but five minutes. Your spine is s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-d like an accordion. It may elongate but a quarter or half inch, but you feel the difference in an hour—you sense a subtle change for the rest of the day. For Spine Motion spreads the tiny bones that make up the spinal column which have been *pressing on every tiny nerve of the body*. The whole nervous system is connected with the spine. In youth, the cartilage between the spinal vertebrae is a springy, cushiony protection for the nerves. As we age, these pads or "insulators" wear down—the sensitive nerves come in contact with these bones—you know the result! Loss of nervous energy—sluggish vital organs; indigestion; constipation; headaches.

With the flexing and "shaking out" of the spine the impinged nerves are freed—the nervous forces are no longer "short-circuited" but flow freely to every extremity—you feel new power and "pep."

Spine Motion is absolutely all that Col. Bemis used to recover the energies Nature had provided so liberally. He made it a fixed daily habit for a time. After several weeks he found the cartilage stimulated to new growth and resiliency, and dropped to twice or thrice weekly with the motions. Nature has now reasserted herself so that he tells me it is only occasionally he employs the unique stretching process. The spine does not so readily "settle down" once the five movements in Spine Motion have been introduced. They are most unique motions; hard to describe but easy to do; they give the system an indescribable thrill even at the time. I haven't had a backache since I learned them; nor had a day without a healthful evacuation. As for the colonel, he is doing more work than ever, is up till all hours, eats what he likes, smokes incessantly—and he doesn't seem to *have* any nerves.



"The Colonel may look his age, but by all that's remarkable he doesn't act it—nor feel it, if his enthusiasm is any indication"

Bradstreet no longer offers his personal services in conditioning men, but you can have Spine Motion in the same form it was given Col. Bemis. The motions have been made clear in five photographs that Bradstreet posed himself. He gives you simple, unmistakable instructions with them. There is no "apparatus." You just do those movements in a few minutes, and in a few days you experience the most marvelous "pick-up"—you look better—feel better—and function better in every way. Oh, that everyone knew of this rejuvenator—young men prematurely old—men whose years have dulled normal interests and desires—all men physically below *par!*

Those wanting a speedy and surprising demonstration of Spine Motion may have the complete method for a week's trial that is free in every sense. Send nothing but your name and address. Then, if it proves plainly that it will *work wonders* for you—pay Hobart Bradstreet the tremendous sum of three dollars for everything! For those willing to be *shown* there is a coupon below.

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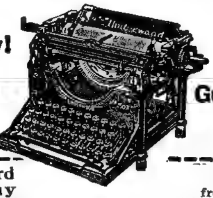

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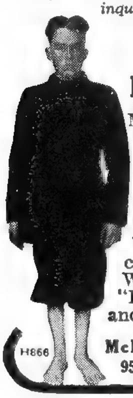

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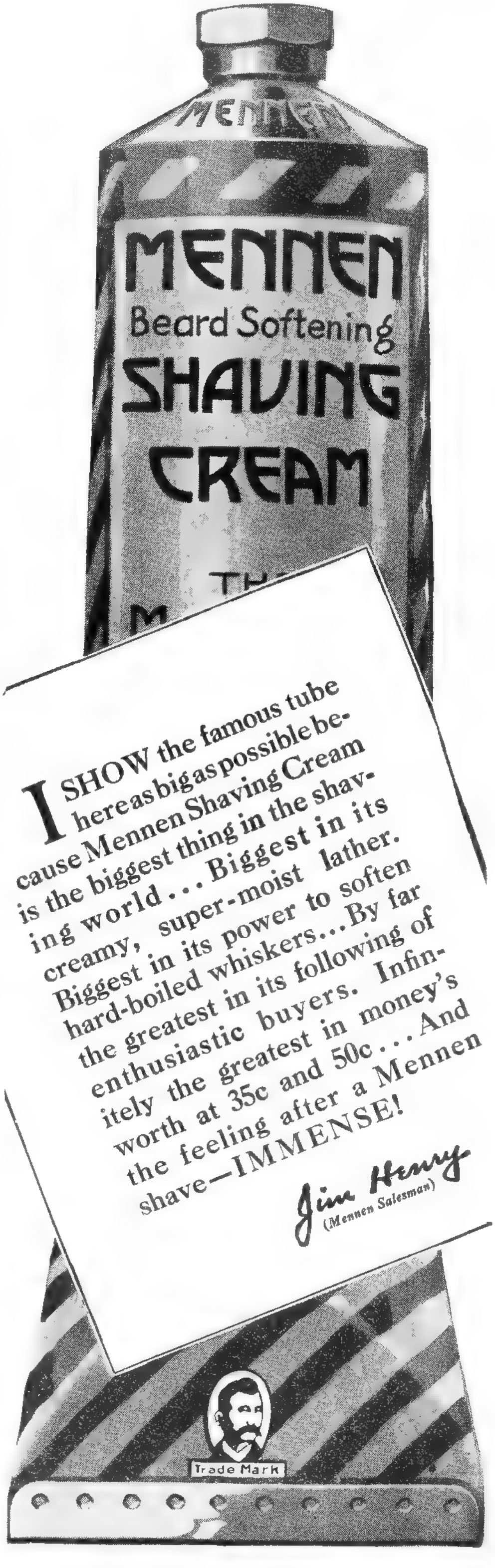

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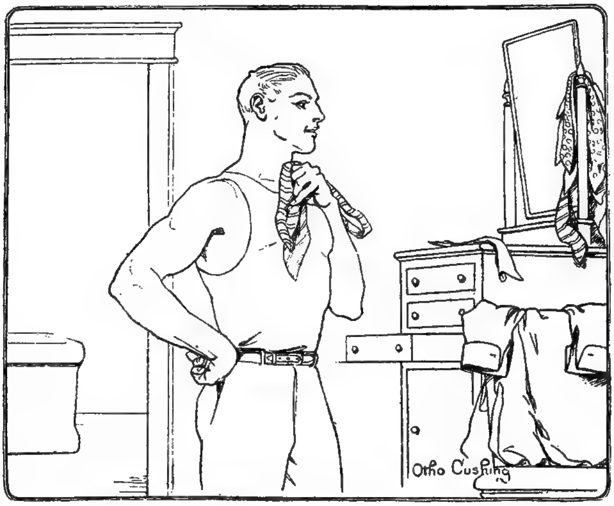

WHEN a member of the Modest Order of Gray Doves suddenly breaks out a brilliant pennon from his Adam's apple, you may be pretty sure he has found some subtle reason for flinging defiance at a threatening world.

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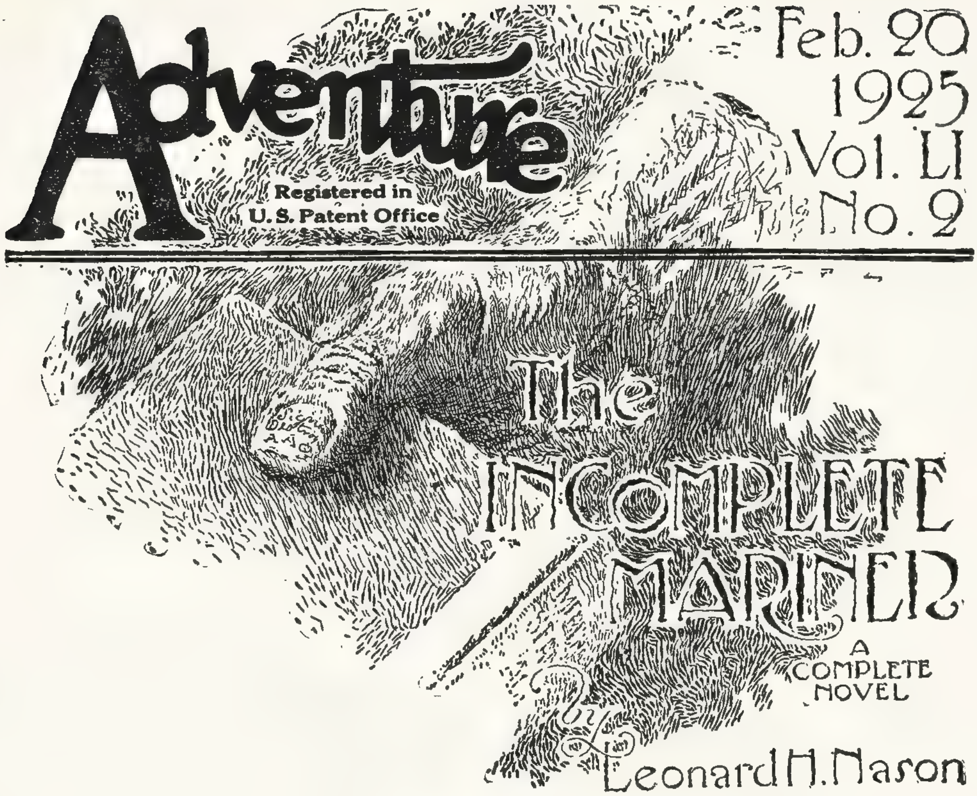

The Incomplete Mariner

A Complete Novel

by Leonard H. Nason

Author of "Rockets at Daybreak," "The Casual's Return," etc.

IN THE city of Boston the abode of big business is confined to a small area in the district about Summer, State and Federal Streets. Seven-thirty in the morning is an early hour here; the offices do not open until nine; few people are to be seen on the streets. No autos, no carriages, no pedestrians.

At this hour on State Street the watchman of one of the banks was accustomed to have a can of coffee from a near-by lunchroom, and the officer of the law, who had been on that beat for eight or nine years, always dropped in at that time and shared the coffee with his friend. They used to drink it in the big directors' room, before the window, from whence a fine view of the street could be had and the officer could see his sergeant approaching in plenty of time to slip out to the sidewalk again.

"It's a fine May morning," remarked the watchman, blowing on the coffee to cool it a bit.

"It is that," agreed the policeman. "Would ye mind bendin' your arm a bit now and then lettin' me have a drop o' the coffee? It'll be all gone in steam if ye keep blowin' on it that way."

The watchman drank and then passed the can to his companion, who straightway hid his face behind it.

"Where's our friend this morning?" asked the watchman suddenly. "He's late."

The officer peered through the window at the entrance of the building across the street.

"He's not there, is he? Maybe he's had an accidint on the way in."

"Maybe he has," agreed the other; "it's not like him to be late. Think of a man with all his money goin' to work every day of the year at seven-thirty in the mornin', winter and summer, rain or shine! If I had the half of what he pays fer office rent, I would spend the rest of me life in an armchair."

"He was a poor man wanst," said the

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officer, having another drag at the coffee. "Maybe he got the habit of goin' to work early then, an' can't shake it. I see by the papers that we're goin' to start trainin' officers for the new Army at Plattsburg. 'Tis just another way fer them swells to spend their money. For what do we want to raise an army? Them Germans is licked already."

"Sure they're licked," said the watchman. "My oldest boy 'n' me had a row about it last night. He belongs to the Ninth, ye know, an' I was for gettin' him out of it, because of his wife an' kids, but do ye think the fool would agree? 'I'm goin' to war,' says he. 'I'll see it through,' says he, 'fer the company have agreed to pay my salary while I'm gone.' "

"There he is!" cried the policeman. "He must 'a' had a blowout, fer it's the first time he's been late fer I don't know how long."

He pointed across the street as a closed automobile of expensive make stopped before the other building. The chauffeur leaped out, opened the door and held it wide for the passenger to alight. Then the chauffeur leaped back to his seat and the car drove away. The watchman and the police officer observed.

The man who had alighted from the car was clad in grey. He had an erect figure and broad, strong shoulders. He appeared to be about fifty years of age. He struck the pavement with his cane, looked up and down the street and then appeared to consider deeply.

A newsboy hurried by and proffered him a paper. This the man took absent-mindedly and glanced at the headlines. Then he suddenly crushed the paper into a ball, threw it in the gutter and, striking the pavement again, entered the building and was lost to view.

"He's got somethin' on his mind," remarked the watchman.

"Maybe they're after raidin' his stock," guessed the policeman. "Let's have that paper there an' see what made him so mad."

The two men bent over the paper, but they could see no report of stock market activity on the front page. There were a number of items there, the principal one being that the training camp for officers of the new army had that morning been opened at Plattsburg.

THE morning advanced. The police officer went back to his beat, the watchman túrned over his clock and keys to the day man. Men and women began to hurry out of the subway entrances and stream down the street, faster, thicker, until a few minutes before nine there was a veritable torrent of humanity pouring along the pavement; and then suddenly, after the stroke of nine had sounded, it thinned, waned and died.

The day had begun in earnest, motors hurried up and down, drays rattled on their way to the markets in the next street and messengers scurried from bank to building and back again.

All was bustle and activity, save in the one great room above the street that was the private, guarded sanctum of the man who had alighted from the automobile an hour before. Here the man sat at the unopened desk, his hat still on his head and his stick still in his hand.

He looked out of the great window with unseeing eyes and every now and then bit his lip and gave a gesture of impatience. Often he looked at his watch and then struck the floor with his cane, as if impatient at the lagging hours.

His face somewhat relaxed when he heard sounds in the outer office indicative of the arrival of the underlings, and he remembered then that he had not yet removed his hat. This he proceeded to do and hung his stick in the corner.

This man was Samuel V. Crocker, head of a great American combine, a combine that had been made in the usual manner, by going after each competitor in turn and either crushing him to earth or making a subsidiary company of him.

Samuel V. Crocker was a fighter, a practical business man, one who thought clearly and soberly, one not to be swayed by false pity or driveling sentiment. His wife was dead. It is the wifeless man that knows no mercy. He had a son, a youth of twenty-one, in college.

Now every morning in the year Mr. Crocker arrived at his office at seven-thirty. From then until nine he thought and made his plans undisturbed. That was *his* hour and a half; no one ever interrupted.

During the day there were calls, decisions to make, conferences to be had, a thousand interruptions, but in the early morning, before the office opened, he could think disturbed. His master mind always found a solution to the knottiest problem. But not today; not this morning.

He was no nearer decision than when he had entered. Indeed he was farther from it. At that moment Mr. Colt, who was confidential secretary, right-hand man and master of the horse to the head of the business, entered silently from a side door.

He always appeared at this time with such of the mail as he thought his chief ought to see. He was about to retire again, when the other man spoke.

"Wait a minute, Colt! I've got something I want to talk about. Here—" kicking a chair into the center of the room—"sit down!"

Mr. Colt sat down on the edge of the chair. He was rarely bidden to a conference, and then he was not asked to sit. Mr. Colt's work consisted of doing as he was told and keeping quiet, keeping out undesirables, letting in desirables and giving signed statements to reporters on those occasions when the press wanted to know what Mr. Crocker was going to do next.

So then, Mr. Colt sat on the edge of the chair and licked his lips.

"My son," began Mr. Crocker, "is an idiotic young ass!"

Then he stopped and had an inward struggle.

"Where was he arrested?" asked Mr. Colt after a long silence.

The younger Crocker was not unknown to Mr. Colt.

"He hasn't been arrested!" barked the other man. "He's at home, probably in bed, for I told him to be here at nine o'clock! I don't think he ever got up before noon in his life. That's what college does for a man, and boarding school and what not. When I was his age, I was married, by ——, and doing business under my own name!"

There was another silence.

"Has he married some one?" suggested Mr. Colt.

"No, he hasn't. He has brains enough to steer clear of that!"

Mr. Colt then maintained silence, while he thought of all the things a man might do that would cause his father to think he was an ass, and he could think of many that the young Mr. Crocker would be likely to do.

The young man had not a great deal of originality. His exploits consisted of those conventional mishaps such as arrests for speeding, ejection from places of amusement and destruction of plate glass following athletic victories.

After a long while Mr. Colt hazarded the remark that it must be something out of the ordinary that the young Mr. Crocker had done. Mr. Crocker rumbled.

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Colt, "if you were to tell me what he had done, I might be able to think of something."

Mr. Crocker swung about and stared directly into his employee's face.

"Do you know what that miserable whelp wants to do? Why ——, he came home from college last night and said that he wanted to enlist in the Army!"

Mr. Colt was much surprized.

"Why, I should think that was a highly admirable desire!" he said.

"Highly admirable! Are you crazy? You walk up to the Common and you'll see a soldier up there by a tent. He's a colonel or a sergeant or something like that and he's getting recruits. Do you suppose I want my son—my son, you understand—to associate with men like that? Do you think my son is going to be ordered about by a lot of drunkards? Go down to Atlantic Avenue, where they take their boats. Do you think I'm going to have my son go around with that type of man? Not by a jugful!"

"Ah," said Mr. Colt mildly, "but every young man is going into the Army now. It's quite the thing to do in fact. And if he doesn't enlist now, the draft will get him, you know. He'll have to go anyway. In wartime it's usually considered quite the thing to enlist."

Now something of this had been in the old man's mind all the morning. He had felt the toils closing about him. If the boy enlisted he was gone, and if he didn't enlist, the draft would get him and he would be gone just the same. It was a thing that had to be discussed with some one, and Colt was the only man in whom the elder Crocker dared confide.

"That's all very well," said Mr. Crocker. "I know this country has gone to pulling other people's chestnuts out of the fire and it's going to ruin business. I don't think we'll do much for a while, because that numbskull in Washington thinks he can talk the Germans to death. But I know better.

"They mean business. I was in Germany when this thing began and I saw them.

Sooner or later we're going to be in it just as deep, and deeper, than France and England are now. And when that time comes, I don't want my boy to be on the firing line. He's my boy! Understand that? And I haven't spent a fortune on his education to have him killed, not by a jugful. Now then, what's to be done?"

"It would seem to me," said Mr. Colt after some reflection, "that the only thing to do would be to get him out of the country."

"But how?"

"Well, that might be arranged."

"Well, you arrange it, will you? We've got to work fast. This cub of mine broke in on me last night and blurted out that he wanted to join the Army. I refused to discuss it, and told him to see me at my office if he didn't return to college. He didn't return. I know him. I told him to be here by nine. He'll show up in the afternoon, then we'll settle this thing, that's all."

Mr. Colt rose to go, but the other man detained him with outstretched hand.

"Now, understand me, Colt: There's to be nothing rough about this, no kidnaping, no smuggling away. I want you to find a place for me to send him, and a logical excuse for sending him there and a sure method of keeping him there after he gets there. But all regular and aboveboard; otherwise he'll buck and we'll have trouble. He's of age, you know. I can't appoint a guardian for him."

Mr. Colt nodded and made as if to go again. When he was at the door his chief called to him once more.

"And one more thing, Colt. Patriotism is all right. I'm as good an American as the next, and I'll do all I can to help win this war, now we're in it, but when it comes to sending my only son to risk his life on the other side of the world, fighting for such —— nonsense as making the world safe for democracy, that's another matter."

Then Mr. Colt withdrew.

MR. COLT went into his own little office and sat down at his desk. He took out a railroad guide and searched it. He arose and inspected a map of the United States that hung on the wall.

Canada was on one side and Mexico on the other. Neither would do. Canada would be a fine place to send a man to keep him out of war, and so would Mexico!

He went into the outer office and consulted an atlas. Was there any country on the earth that was not involved in this war? Where could this boy go that he would not have a chance to fight? And then the next page gave the answer—South America.

South America.

"By Judas!" he exclaimed, "I've got it!"

Then he hurried back to his office and picked up the telephone.

"Hello," he said after the connection had been made. "Is this the Gilbert Tourist Agency? I want to make reservations for a man going to Buenos Aires for your next sailing."

"Sure," replied the man at the other end of the wire.

They went into details regarding stateroom location, which were arranged to Mr. Colt's satisfaction.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"One thing. How old is your man?"

"About twenty-one."

"Of course he has authority to leave the country?"

"Of course," said Mr. Colt. "Good-by."

The receiver clicked. Mr. Colt arose and looked out the window.

"I might have known," he muttered. "Still I'm not licked."

He thought a long time, then grinned and stepped to a file.

"I'll fix this thing yet," he assured himself.

After searching through the file he drew out a greasy card, with another larger card on which something was written, something about dyes, amounts, weights, a date and certain sums of money. Mr. Colt looked at the greasy card again.

It was a calling card, such as may be purchased at any amusement resort or in any sailor town; one of the kind that is written to order with a pen, embellished with many beautiful curls and flourishes. The corners were decorated with what was intended to represent rope, done in a kind of mooring-knot effect.

The name on the card was Captain Thomas Alexander, and it would seem from the decorations that he was a seafaring man. Mr. Colt referred to the larger card and found there an address—"To be found at The Broken Home." That was all.

Mr. Colt put the card to his teeth and blew upon it with a whistling effect.

"That young fool!" he muttered. "Why

didn't he enlist and then tell the old man about it afterward? But then, I suppose he never had an independent thought in his life."

Mr. Colt pondered a long while. He had an uneasy feeling that what he was about to do was not quite the proper thing. Mr. Colt had a son of his own, who was at that precise moment being initiated into the mysteries of stowing a bag properly, under the leadership of a very impatient jimmy-legs. Mr. Colt's son had chosen to do his bit by sea.

"I can go in there," said Mr. Colt, "and tell the boss to go to —— and then find myself a job, having my patriotism to keep my family fed and a roof over my head, or I can be a little less patriotic and hold my job. As to young Crocker, if the United States loses the war because he is not in its Army, then the responsibility will be mine. Now then, I'll take a sneak down to the 'Broken Home' and see if any one knows of Captain Alexander's whereabouts."

THEN Mr. Colt went out and wended his way toward the waterfront. He made one stop at a tobacco store to purchase a carton of cigarets to send to his son, where that young man was learning to roll in his walk and to wear wide pants that had no visible means of support.

Shortly before the noon hour, a red drop-signal on the wall of Mr. Crocker's office announced that Mr. Colt had returned and was at his service. Mr. Crocker grunted satisfaction and immediately rang for the confidential secretary.

"Now then," he began as soon as Mr. Colt's head was inside the door, "let's have it. Where shall I send him, and why?"

Mr. Colt seated himself this time without an invitation. He leaned back in his chair and, extracting a fearful pipe from his pocket, filled and lighted it. A cigar would have been bad enough, but a pipe! However, he went unrebuked, although Mr. Crocker ground his teeth.

"I decided, after consideration," began Mr. Colt, "that South America would be the place. Central America is too hot and very dull, and much too near the Canal Zone, where he could enlist if he got restless.

"But South America is the place. No American garrisons anywhere near, and none of the nations taking an active part in the row in Europe, although I guess they're all lined up on one side or the other.

"But when I called up to see about sailings, et cetera, they asked me how old he was. That was a poser. If he's within the draft age he can't leave the country openly. And, of course, if we tried to smuggle him out, he'd smell a rat at once. So then I began to think."

Mr. Colt puffed at his pipe and an odor as of burning tankage and drying bone-dust arose.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Crocker, waving the smoke away from his face. "Then what?"

"Well, you remember some time ago, a year or more, I guess, we did a little business with a Captain Alexander? He said that he could get us some chemicals that we hadn't been able to get for some time, and we didn't believe him?"

Mr. Crocker gave a slight start.

"The old fellow with the whiskers, you mean, that we sold crude rubber to? I remember. I've had my doubts of where that rubber went for some time."

"I haven't," said Mr. Colt. "I know where it went. It went to the same place those chemicals came from and what's more, I can guess how it got there. But that's not the point. The point is that I figured that now we were in the war, the old captain might have struck a dull season, and might perhaps be open to a charter.

"Mr. Atkins has a shipment for the River Plata, and if you spoke a word to him, it could be sent by Captain Alexander's boat. We'd lose a little money on time, perhaps, but we'd gain it in the end."

"How does this affect my son?" asked Mr. Crocker impatiently.

"Why, we'll send your son on the boat with the shipment and meanwhile inform the Argentine agents that the younger Mr. Crocker is arriving to learn the business from that end and is to be detained until further notice."

"*Gruumph!*" remarked Mr. Crocker. "What's to prevent him from coming back on the first boat?"

"Well, I would see that he was not over-well supplied with funds and also, once he has a taste of the Argentine, he'll forget any intentions he may have had about enlisting."

"How are we to get him to go? You can't shanghai a man in these days, and I don't want him shanghaied, anyway. He's my son, you must remember."

"No, no, nothing like that. We'll simply tell him that we have a contract to be secured in South America, that we have inside dope on it and that it is necessary that we send some one of discretion to arrange it. This person must maintain absolute secrecy about his purpose and the parties that sent him, otherwise our competitors will get hold of the news and make attempts to secure the contract for themselves."

"Bah!" growled Mr. Crocker. "What competitors have I got that dare to look me in the eye, much less take a contract away from me?"

"But your son doesn't know that, does he?"

"True enough, go on!"

"Well, that's all. I think he'll go willingly enough and we could say that he'd have your permission to enlist when he returned. That will be all right, because he won't return until after the war. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you seen Alexander?"

AT this moment there was a soft clicking from the desk in front of Mr. Crocker. There was a pane of glass there through which could be seen a sheet of paper and a pencil. The pencil was writing, moved by a ghostly hand. Both men looked to see the writing on the wall.

"Your son is outside," ran the message.

This machine was operated by one who sat in the outer office and wrote messages to the chief to inform him who wanted to see him. The unseen operator wrote a description of the visitor, what he had with him, what he looked like, and added the name if the visitor was known to him.

All this while the visitor's card was being given to the office manager, thence to Mr. Colt, and finally, if Mr. Colt thought proper, to Mr. Crocker. By the time the card got to Mr. Crocker, he knew a good deal about his caller and had made up his mind whether or not the caller was a crank, a solicitor for funds, a newspaper man or some one who should be admitted to the sanctum.

It would be some minutes before young Crocker would be officially announced, but the father glanced at the drop board again. The little red drops were all down, indicating that none of Mr. Crocker's lieutenants had gone out to lunch.

"I'd better have him in right away," said Mr. Crocker, "before any one sees him sitting out there. They'll all be thinking he's been kicked out of college again. Alexander is willing, you say?"

"Yes, he's willing."

Mr. Crocker then pressed a key on the inter-communicating phone and the two men waited silently for the son to appear.

The young Mr. Crocker's name was Clifton. He was an only child. He sat on the mourners' bench outside the office rail and brushed his hat. He wondered where his old man had found such a good-looking switchboard operator, and he wished he had seen her first. He would like to take her out to a show, but if she worked for his old man he wouldn't dare. The old man's office was a closed preserve as far as he was concerned. It was difficult to take a girl to supper after she had seen you go in and brace your father for the money to take her out with.

Clifton was quietly dressed. He had sporty clothes, but he left them in the closet when he went to the office. He also had a low-bellied car that was known to the police of four states and two countries, but when he called at the office he came via the subway.

He liked to look poor when his father's eye was upon him. The young man had a clear, healthy skin and a bright eye. One thumb was bound with tape where a horsehide-covered projectile had injured it. Clifton was a ball player and held down the first sack in as good shape as had any man since the year his college had beaten Yale.

Clifton, by the way, attended a college that dated everything from athletic victories over more powerful rivals.

Now one more thing about young Crocker. His father had been a selfmade man, and fearing that his son would turn out a mental zero, as so many sons of rich men, selfmade and otherwise do, he had turned him out to pasture during the summer. That is to say, he had cut off his allowance and made the poor boy maintain himself until fall.

This is a dangerous thing for a father to do, for if the son finds himself a job and earns his keep, he is likely to have exaggerated ideas of his own independence. It also starts a young man to doing his own thinking, and this is bad for a father who has plans for his son's future.

So then, Mr. Clifton Crocker, being summoned, entered his father's office and, shaking hands with his father, bowed to Mr.

Colt, thinking uneasily of the last time he had seen Mr. Colt—through the bars of a cell door—and sat down to wait until he was bidden to speak.

"Mr. Colt and I have just been talking," began the elder Crocker, "about a very important deal we must put through in South America. It demands the presence of a personal representative of the firm. It is highly important that no one be sent that would be recognized by any of the other companies or the agents for them, either in South America or this country. Now that you've left college, it seems to me that you're the man and I think you'd do a good job."

Clifton looked at Mr. Colt before he spoke.

"I know, dad," said he, "but I thought you wanted me to come down and discuss the question of my enlisting."

At this Mr. Colt arose and looked out of the window. Mr. Crocker senior began to rumble and tap the desk with a pencil.

"He's getting up steam," thought Clifton, and mentally determined to stick to his guns.

"Bah!" snorted Mr. Crocker. "Enlist! Bah! You're crazy! What do you want to enlist for?"

"Well," said Clifton, "everybody else is enlisting, and as that cartoonist said yesterday, 'It's the only war we've got.'

"Moreover and besides, if I enlist, I get credit for all my courses without taking a final examination and that means a lot. I couldn't pass in Ethics or English Lit. if I lived to be a hundred. And I'm a little tottery in structures, too. But if I enlist, I'll pass 'em all up and maybe get a degree without taking a fourth year."

"So that's why you want to enlist! Well, there's no rush about it. There isn't any time limit, is there?"

"Well, no, I don't know if there is. But it has to be done before the war is over, you know."

"Then why can't you make this trip for us and then enlist afterward?"

"The war may be over by then."

"Bah! You're like the rest of the idiots in this country! You've been fed on so much pap and gruel all these years that you think we can lick the foremost military power in the world with our hands tied behind our backs. I don't know anything about the Army, but I know something about wool!

"We sell the French government in one month more wool for uniforms than we've sold the United States since I've been in the business. Where will you get a uniform to wear? How will you get to France to wear it? Walk? No, sir!

"You'll have time to go to South America and raise a family before we raise an Army. Maybe your sons can take part in the war."

The young Clifton decided that it would be poor policy to continue that subject just then.

"How will I get to South America?" he asked.

Here Mr. Colt turned from the window.

"That will be simple enough," he said. "The house has a shipment for the Argentine and you can go with it on the same boat. It will be better than sending you the regular way, because if any of our competitors get wind of this thing it will be all off.

"The name of Crocker on the passenger list of a South American boat would be all that was needed to tip off the whole country, other bids would come in, and the bottom fall out of the market."

"That's a long trip by sea," remarked Clifton when the other man had finished speaking. "That's a long way down there. I haven't any wild craze to make a sea voyage."

"Have you ever been to sea?" asked Mr. Colt.

"Once," replied Clifton. "I went to New York by boat and they blew the foghorn all night so that I couldn't sleep a wink. Man, every time that thing went off I came right up out of the bed! No, I've never had any taste for the sea since then."

"Yes," said Mr. Colt soothingly, "but this will be different. You go right out to sea and they don't blow the foghorn at sea. You'll have the time of your life. Very few young men get a chance to go to South America. I wish I could go."

"I don't crave it," said Clifton dubiously.

At that the elder Crocker exploded.

"Whose son are you, anyway?" he cried. "After all the money I've spent on you and the time I've wasted making plans for you, you can't give me a month or two when I need it. You can either go back to college or go to South America, or by ——, I'm through with you!"

The watching Colt saw Clifton's nostrils flare at this, and noted the jaw muscles beginning to vibrate, and he leaped— mentally—between the two contestants.

"Now, Cliff," he began, "you and I have had some dealings in the past, and we have always got along very well."

HE paused to let his words sink in. They sank beautifully, for Clifton had an active mind. He knew that Colt was referring to certain escapades of his, the details of which had been suppressed from the elder Crocker. Colt had always been the man that had bailed him out, and gone to court with the family lawyer and reported to the old man afterward. Colt had been a good sport more than once.

"No, Cliff," continued Colt, "this is a very important mission. You'll have lots of time to go and do what we want you to and then come back and fight fifty wars. We've got a hand in this pie, you know. Big business knows more about this war than the Army.

"The camps won't be ready until next spring and you can't keep an army in tents through the winter. We have contracts for pipe, delivery to be on or before October first. Does that look like immediate action? You could go round the world before then, let alone to South America."

"Maybe so," sighed Clifton. "But do I understand that I can enlist when the voyage is done?"

The elder Crocker began to boil again, but he caught the eye of his confidential secretary and said not a word. He swallowed several times, and finally spoke.

"Yes," he said, "when you've finished your errand, you can enlist."

"All right then," said Cliff, "I'll go you."

"There, that's settled," cried the elder Crocker.

They all shook hands.

"Now then," said the father, "Let's go and eat."

"And afterward," said Mr. Colt, rising, "I must take Cliff down and buy him a uniform."

"A uniform!" cried the other two.

"Yes, a uniform. Captain Alexander said that in order to avoid a lot of talk—his vessel is not a passenger boat, you know—that Cliff should wear a Naval officer's uniform and the captain would say that Cliff was noting the ship's qualities as a sea boat, with an idea of the Navy taking her over for a mine-sweeper. That would explain Cliff being aboard and would stop a lot of what would be unwelcome publicity."

The captain hadn't said exactly the last. He had said that no one would look to see a fugitive from military service in a Naval officer's uniform at sea, and that the Navy was held in such respect and awe by all the merchant marine, that not even a pilot would dare say boo to a brand new ensign.

"Be sure you don't take anything in your luggage," continued Mr. Colt, "any letters or initialed hair brushes that would identify you. Paint out your name on the trunks, or have the letters washed off. We don't want our competitors to get the least hint of this. No one on the ship knows your name, but Captain Alexander and Mr. Jacobs."

"Gee," said Cliff. "I won't mind that at all. I must have some pictures taken before I sail. They'll make the gang sore."

THE afternoon of the following day Clifton, his father and Mr. Colt assembled in the private office. In a corner were some pasteboard boxes containing Clifton's new uniform. Clifton himself carried a small grip, but the rest of his baggage had gone direct to the ship.

The ship was sailing the next day at noon, but the captain had suggested that the young man go aboard after dark and stay out of sight until well out to sea, in order to cause as little comment as possible.

A conference had been had with Captain Alexander at supper the night before, and it had been arranged that he should meet the other three men in the office after hours and that the farewells should be said there. Then the captain and Clifton would go down to the ship under cover of darkness.

The three were waiting for the captain, who had not yet arrived. They fidgeted and squirmed and the elder Crocker kept lighting cigars and letting them go out again. Mr. Colt smoked his pipe, bit his fingers and looked out of the window.

Clifton had something on his mind. He kept looking at the packages in the corner and finally spoke.

"I think," he began, "that I'll sneak out and put on that uniform. It may not fit very well. These rush jobs, you know, don't always turn out."

"Oh, leave the cursed thing in the box till you get on shipboard!" cried his father. "I hate the sight of a uniform; I hate the thought of one. My father belonged to the Knights of Hermodias, uniformed degree, and every time he got home from a parade he used to lick me with the tin sword he carried. I can't look at a uniform to this day without disgust!"

"It would be nice if I got out on the ocean and found that I had a coat with a forty inch chest instead of a thirty-six, wouldn't it!"

"Well, put it on, then, but don't keep it on. I don't want to see it!"

Clifton retired and put on his uniform. It fitted him. Naval tailors are accustomed to turning out a uniform over night and doing it well. The brass on cuff and collar, and the device on the cap was very new and glittering, but this made it all the more delightful in Clifton's eyes.

A real ensign would have soaked that new lace in salt water to make it look seagoing before he appeared in it. Clifton surveyed himself in the mirror in the washing cabinet, and informed himself that he looked swell.

"Doggone the luck," he muttered, "I won't be able to have any pictures taken! Well, maybe I can take some on the boat."

He looked about for something to wear over his uniform, so that his father's memory would not be unpleasantly disturbed, and having espied an old cotton duster, he put it on and returned to the office. Captain Alexander had meanwhile come in, but as no one said anything about a uniform, he did not see Clifton's.

The captain wore a pepper and salt suit, a little old fashioned in cut, for he only wore it when ashore, and it had had little wear in the last fifteen years. His linen was spotless. He had blue eyes, with wrinkles at the corners from many years of squinting over sunlit seas, and very firm white teeth that cost twenty-five dollars a set. He appeared ill at ease and kept crossing one leg over the other, and continually using his handkerchief.

"How d'y do?" said the captain when Cliff entered. "I hope I find you well. Meet Mr. Jacobs, my chief mate. I was just telling your father and this other gentleman that Mr. Jacobs is to take you down to the ship. I never go down to her when she's in port, so he will do the honors."

The mate rose from his corner and shook hands awkwardly, muttering something under his breath. He was young and black haired, older than Cliff, of course, but not very much.

He had a hand like a ham and an arm and shoulder like a fore-quarter of beef. His nails were broken, there were brown stains of lye around the bases, and his knuckles were covered with little white scars.

His clothes were very stiff and new, his shoes very black. He wore a white bow tie on a blue shirt, with a diamond pin stuck in the shirt bosom to break the monotony of a large expanse of blue flannel, and also to display the pin.

"I suppose there's nothing more to be said," began the elder Crocker after a very heavy silence. "You might as well go along, Cliff. Now, you've got enough money for the trip. You can't buy anything on the boat and I'll see that when you get to your destination you're supplied with funds. Have you got everything you want in the line of clothes and razors and things like that?"

"I guess so," said Cliff.

"Well, good-by, then, for a while, and good luck."

Father and son shook hands and then Cliff started to pick up his bag.

"I'll carry that," said Mr. Jacobs, grinning and seizing the bag.

Mr. Colt, who had stepped out, returned and reported that the office was empty, so Cliff, Mr. Jacobs and the captain went out and so to the street.

WHEN the door had closed behind them Mr. Crocker gave a short sigh. Mr. Colt clucked sympathetically.

"It's tough to have to see him go and not know when he's coming back, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Crocker, "it is, but I know he's just going to South America and I know that I'll see him eventually. It isn't like saying good-by to a boy that you've raised from babyhood, a boy that has been your only companion and is as much a part of you as your own heart, and know that you may never see him again or even know where his grave is."

"That's so," agreed Mr. Colt.

He thought sadly enough that was how he had said good-by to *his* boy and he wondered where he was then.

"If you are rich," thought Mr. Colt bitterly, "you can keep everything, even your son, but if you are poor, you have to give him up."

It was all right to be patriotic and pay the debt you owed your country, but your country didn't read to your son after supper every evening, nor put him to bed, nor take him for walks when he clung to one finger with a chubby hand, all dimples over the knuckles.

The two men sat alone and wordless, while the shadows crept in and took possession of the room. Mr. Colt still thought of his son.

That young man at that moment was seated with several hundred others in a large, well-lighted hall and had just then raised a dish above his head, indicating that it was empty and he wished it filled with food.

He had already disposed of enough slices of cold meat to keep several men of sedentary life satisfied, and he had likewise inhaled at least a quart of coffee drawn from a very bright copper hook-pot.

* * *

MR. CROCKER'S son was at the junction of State Street with Atlantic Avenue, where he and Mr. Jacobs were bidding the captain good-by. Then the mate and Cliff turned northward.

"What was the captain so upset about when he saw I had my uniform on?" asked Cliff.

"Oh, I don't know," said the other. "Maybe he thought people would wonder what you were going on the ship for. There's customs guards around all them docks. But still, I don't think any one would notice. There's so many ships got Navy guards now that they wouldn't give it a second thought."

"Have you got a guard?" asked Cliff.

"No," said the mate. "We ain't. Have you ever been to sea before?"

"Never," said Cliff. "Why haven't you got a guard? Aren't you afraid of submarines?"

Mr. Jacobs stopped and put down the bag.

"Are you in the know?" he asked, peering very closely into Cliff's eyes.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Cliff in astonishment so real that the mate grunted and picked up the bag.

"We don't carry any gun," said he, watching Cliff out of the corner of his eyes, "because it puts an undue strain on the sheer strakes gudgeons."

"Oh," said Cliff, "I see."

Mr. Jacobs was then afflicted with a coughing spell and before it was over the two had reached the ferry house, from whence they took ship to cross over to East Boston, where their vessel lay.

On the East Boston shore they went up and down so many narrow dirty streets, and wound in and out so about the wharves that Cliff was quite lost. Finally they came to a gate in a high picket fence and the watchman, seeing Mr. Jacobs, opened without question, bidding them a cheery good evening.

They then went down the wharf, among barrels and boxes and crates of machinery.

At about the same time two men tied the painter of a small boat to the end of the wharf and climbed up a weed hung ladder to the pier. Here they sank down in the shadow of the cluster of piles.

"We ought to 'a' got here before dark," said one of the men.

"How we gonna get here before dark with all them police boats hangin' around? D'yuh wanna get yerself put away again? Ain't yuh got no sense? Who's to know anyway, whether we're here or not?"

At this moment the other man gripped the speaker's arm convulsively and pointed. The two slunk closer in the shadow of the piles.

Mr. Jacobs was coming along the wharf, with Cliff, and as they passed under each electric light, the rays would glitter on Cliff's gold lace. The men watched, cursing softly to themselves. Cliff and the mate came down to where a ladder went up to the deck. Not a gangway, but a real ladder, such as painters use.

The ship was not a passenger vessel and when any one wanted to board her they could shin up the ladder or stay ashore. It was too much trouble to ship the sea ladder in port.

Mr. Jacobs went up first, carrying the bag and Cliff followed him, very gingerly. He looked down once between the ship's side and the piles where he could make out the sleek wet back of a camel, floating in the water.

"I suppose that log is there to keep people that fall off the ladder from going under the ship," he remarked.

"What log?" said Mr. Jacobs. "Oh, that camel? That's to keep her away from the dock. That ain't a log, it's a float. Come on, I'll show you your berth and then we'll eat."

They went forward on the well deck and then mounted a ladder to the upper deck, where there were a number of doors. Mr. Jacobs took Cliff to the side away from the dock and, opening one of the doors, cast in the bag and announced:

"Here's your berth. If you want anything, ask me, but I guess you'll find everything here. That door forward, where you see the light, is the saloon and we'll eat there in a minute or two. When you get ready, come up there and I'll meet you."

THE two men on the dock watched Cliff climb the ladder, gain the deck, climb the second ladder and disappear. There was a cargo light hanging in the well deck and when Cliff passed under this the men on the wharf had seen him very clearly. There was no mistaking what he was.

"That's a Navy officer," said one of the men.

"So I see," answered the other. "We had better tell the boss about this."

"Yeh," said the other man, "an' we better scatter outta here, too. We ain't gettin' six bits a night to watch this old can fer nothin'. An' when Navy guys goes sneakin' aboard in the night, it means we're crossin' wires with Uncle Sam. I aims to earn my eatin' money easier."

"What yuh gettin' cold feet fer now? Scared of a guy with a little tin on his collar? He ain't no better'n any one else."

"Listen, boy," said the other. "Was you ever in a Federal prison?"

"No."

"Well, you ain't had much fun, then. An' don't ferget that there's a war on, an' we're in it."

"Aw, go to —— with yer war. Croak, croak, croak. Hangin' crape all the time. Let's tell that guy on the ship that he's got a Navy guy with him."

With this thought in mind the two went forward along the stringpiece and hunted about a minute. They found some bits of coal and picking these up, began to throw them at the ship, where one of the doors on the upper deck stood open and a light showed. When the light went out, they stopped throwing coal.

"You do the talkin,'" said the taller of the two. "I'm goin' to have a look at the boat."

The short man stayed in the shadow of the pier, huddling his coat about him for the night was cold. His teeth chattered and he shook a good deal. Mentally he decided that this was his last night on the job, though he starved to death before he found another.

A man seemed to grow out of the shadows at his side, but the little man did not see him until he spoke, whereat the little man started violently.

"What's the matter?" asked the man in the shadows.

"——!" whispered the little man. "You give me a start. Whaddyuh mean, creepin' up on me that way?"

"Did you throw that coal?" asked the other.

"Sure I threw it, what d'yuh think?"

"What do you want, fool? Are you drunk? What do you mean by getting me down here? Weren't you told not to summon me except in emergency?"

"This is a emergency," chattered the little man. "There's a Navy officer just sneaked aboard."

There was a heavy silence.

"Who took him on?" asked the other man, and the chills ran up and down the little man's spine at the other's tone.

"That big guy, the mate, or whatever he is," said the little man.

"Aha!" spoke a loud voice from the end of the pier, near the cluster piles, "an' what might you be doin' here?"

"Nothin'," spoke up the small man.

THE man in the shadows cursed horribly and struck the little man a terrible blow. Feet pounded off up the pier, and the watchman could be heard calling on some one to halt. There was the bark of a revolver and stabs of light in the blackness, then after a while the place was still.

The man in the shadows listened to the hue and cry at the upper end of the wharf, where men shouted. Then he bent over and picking up the body of the little man, threw it into the slip, between the ship's side and the piles, where there was no camel.

Then he swung himself up the ship's side with the aid of a cargo whip that dangled there and by which he had slid down to the stringpiece.

He walked rapidly aft and looked over the stern. At the end of the wharf was a launch with a brass-buttoned man tying a small rowboat to her rail. The launch lay rolling on the tide and another set of brass buttons sat on the pierhead at the top of the ladder that the two other men had climbed such a short time before.

The man on the ship strained his eyes through the darkness, and when he saw that the men in the launch were harbor police and not man-of-wars' men, he heaved a sigh of relief.

Then he heard voices along the stringpiece, and the heavy tread of men.

"Give's a hand, Tom," said a voice on the wharf. "This lad is hurted. He's nawthin' but a poor wharf rat, after a hand o' bananas maybe, but he should not pull a gun on us."

The men seemed to lower something into the launch.

"Take him to the hospital," said some one, "an' then come back an' get us. We'll be after lookin' fer the rest of the gang. I heard some one speak when we hollered to that feller."

The launch backed away and then chugged off into the darkness.

"Now, then," said the same speaker, "let's comb the wharf. From what I hear at the station, there's bigger game to be found here than that poor bum."

The man on the ship drew back into the shadow of the after house and went forward, where he mounted to his room and took a very fine pistol from beneath the mattress. Then he listened to the police searching the wharf. After a time the launch returned and they went away.

Then the man put back his pistol and turned on his light again. He felt no fear lest the little man's body should be found. The tide would carry it down the harbor and leave it on Bird Island flats or take it into Fort Point Channel, and when it was found the ship would be at sea.

ON the other side of the deck, Cliff had finished supper and was smoking a cigaret in the saloon door.

The saloon ran straight across the ship, from one side of the house to the other and consisted of a tiny paneled room, just wide enough to give room for a leather covered bench, a table, a row of swinging chairs bolted to the deck and a built-in buffet. There was a pantry aft, and a slide allowed the dishes to be shoved into the saloon. When Cliff first entered, the mate was giving some one rocks and shoals for leaving dirty dishes on the table.

"They never take care of this place in port," said the mate. "It always looks a hurrah's nest. There's no other officer aboard, but one of the engineers, and because I was a minute late the mess boy thought I was going to stay ashore. Sit down. If we have potted tongue again, I'll get a new cook."

So they ate supper, meat and potatoes, big half inch slices of bread, and tea that would take the hair off the back of a man's hand. After that the mate went away to his room, excusing himself by saying that he had a cargo diagram to make, and some problems of stowage still unsolved.

Cliff finished one cigaret and lighted another. He heard a faint murmur of voices from the other side of the ship and after a time a small launch slid out from behind the stern of the ship and went off into the darkness.

He walked aft a way, where he could see across the harbor. There were a great many lights twinkling and winking, some high above, some almost on the surface of the harbor. To the west more lights, the lights of the city, and toy trains crossing the bridge where the elevated went over to Charlestown.

Then a little nearer was the great black mass of the Navy yard, and the ships of war. Then more docks, steamers tied up and boats *put-putting* about, invisible save for a tiny red or green spark, low down near the water.

The mystery and the lure and the enticement of the sea seized hold of Cliff and he drew a quavering breath at the thrill of its grip. He decided that he was going to have the time of his life. A woman's lips, and a snake's eyes, and the sea's whispering. Beware of all; but most of all, the sea.

The young man went back to his room, a little wobbly on his feet. He had felt that way several times in his life, for he was a normal young man and had been vamped the normal number of times for one of his age. Perhaps a little more, for his father had wealth.

He fumbled around for the light switch and finally turned it. His room was the ordinary junior officer's cabin, but it was new to him. It had a high berth, with a chest of drawers beneath it, a small table, bolted to the wall, a wash stand and mirror, and decorations in the form of covers from the *Police Gazette* tacked to the bulkhead.

There was a smell of paint, of burned oil, of salt water, fried onions, tobacco smoke, wet clothes and soap. Cliff left the door open when he went to bed. He could lie in his bunk and look up the line of wharves, reaching far up the river to where there was a schooner tied up. One of her crew came aboard full of fermented juice of the corn, and fought with the ship-keeper. Cliff listened to them wrangling for a long time and then fell asleep.

IN THE morning, feet pounding overhead, and cries alongside, accompanied by the sound of rushing water, dragged Cliff from sleep. Before he was fully awake, his door was slammed shut and he could hear water beating on the panels. By the time he had dressed, the sound had ceased though he could still hear the water rushing outside, and a steady scrape, scrape, scrape, interspersed with thuds. He was about to go on deck when the mate thrust in his head.

"Morning," said Mr. Jacobs. "I've brought you some coffee and bread. That's all the breakfast this morning. Too many people snooping around. You'll have to lay low for a while. The Old Man'll be aboard after a while and then we'll go out. Got plenty o' readin' matter?"

"No," said Cliff, "I haven't got a thing."

"Well, I'll fix that," said the mate, putting a cup of coffee and a plate of sandwiches on the desk. "I'll bring you some magazines. This is the first time I ever heard of a chief mate doing steward's work, but there's lots of things happen on this wagon you won't see anywhere else.

"I wouldn't trust that mess boy. They'll finish loading your old man's machinery pretty quick. Then we'll stick in a few cases of condensed milk and groceries and batten down. You keep below till we're well down the harbor.

"The Navy yard's just across the river and those pretty boys practise using their glasses by looking to see who's on some one else's ship. I don't want a boatload of 'em over here to see if I've shanghaied you. They're touchy as —— since the war drug us into it."

The mate then took his departure, saying that he had more things to do than he could shake a stick at, but that he would bring Cliff some magazines. Cliff drank the coffee, ate the sandwiches with some difficulty, for they reminded him of those the cook used to put in his dinner pail the summer he had worked in the road gang, and then waited for the mate and the magazines. Neither arrived.

Cliff unpacked his bag and put his clothes away. Some flies fell into the cold coffee and ended their lives there. Cliff smoked a number of cigarets. This naturally made the room quite cloudy and the young man grew impatient.

"I'm going to open that door a crack, anyway," he said.

He rose and turned the knob. The door did not open. Cliff heaved his shoulder against it and then his whole strength. The door did not even shake. It was made to withstand the hammering of seas and was very thick and strong.

"By golly," said Cliff, "it's locked. Say, wouldn't there be a window in here?"

He looked up at the wall. There wasn't a window there, but there was a porthole. Cliff, after some grunting, unscrewed the glass and raised it. There was a steel wall on the other side of the glass. The deadlight had been shipped from the outside, and since it had been bolted in place, Cliff had little chance of unshipping it with a penknife.

Cliff sat down upon a kind of bench that was built against the bulkhead and calmed his wrath.

"They don't know me, of course," he thought, "and I suppose they don't want to take any chances of my running around the deck and being seen. Some of the old gent's competitors might see me and the cat would be out of the bag. I suppose they have agents on the wharves or else this boat hasn't any license to carry passengers and they don't want the customs men to see me. Well, it won't be long, anyway."

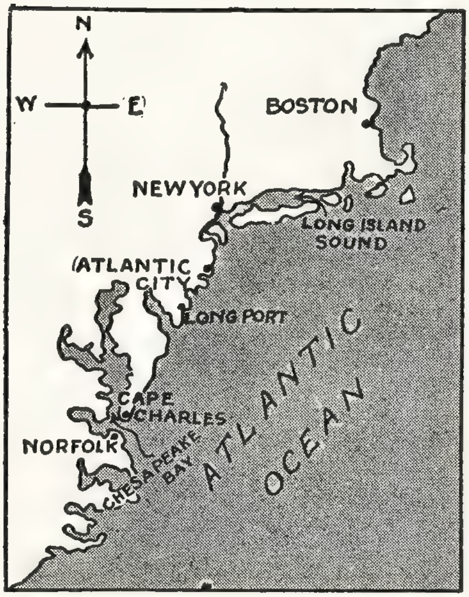
He heard feet pounding about, faint whistling from the harbor, far off cries. He found an old newspaper in the bottom of one of the drawers and after he had read it through completely, he explored the other drawers to see if there were newspapers in them. There were none. One had wrapping paper in the bottom and the other had nothing.

He wondered if his trunks were aboard yet and if so would they put the smallest one in his room. He had some books in that one. At times he knocked on the door.

The morning dragged on, his watch had run down, of course, so that he had no idea of the time, and he could swear that it must be noon at least. Suddenly the ship began to vibrate. There was a throbbing mutter and the bulkheads began to whisper.

"Hurray!" cried Cliff. "Here we go! Now I can get out of this dungeon."

Not so. The engines were just being turned over. After a time they stopped and all was silent once more. The crew were on the other side of the ship, taking in the extra lines and so Cliff could not hear them. Another long period of waiting, while he bit his nails, until a great gurgling sputtering noise startled him.



They were trying to blow the whistle, which, being full of water, did not respond. At last there was a thuttering *whoooo*, and Cliff could feel the ship moving.

He leaped up, ready to go out the moment the door opened, but he was disappointed. The ship backed out of the dock, turned about in the stream, and then went her way down the channel, but Cliff still remained in his prison. He had a flare of hope when the engines began to turn over again, but even when they settled to a steady beat, no one came near the door.

THIS thing was ceasing to be endurable.

"I don't mind staying indoors while we're in port," thought he, "but I certainly don't intend to go to Paraguay or wherever I'm going locked up as if I was a convict. It's time I had dinner. Hey! Outside there! Open this door!"

He beat upon the door and kicked at it lustily. When his toes and hands were quite sore, he refrained. He raged and swore. When he was breathless, he fell to on the door again, but with no success. After that he decided to wait.

"They don't dare to keep me here very long like this," he remarked aloud for his better reassurance, "because my father would buy their boat and sink it with them on it when he found it out."

Suddenly he heard voices outside the door. There was a rattling sound, hands scraped at the panels, then the door swung open and a gush of cold salt air blew into the cabin.

"Think we had forgotten you?" asked a cherry voice.

Cliff leaped over the weather board with wrath in his eye.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

A slight man in a petty officer's cap and blue cotton shirt stood smiling at him. The man's hair was blond and rather thin. He had a pleasant, intelligent face with thin sensitive lips.

"You must have been locked in by mistake," said this man smiling. "This berth hasn't been used for the last two trips and one of the hands probably locked it up when we were getting ready for sea. We didn't know where you were, or we'd have been after you before. When you weren't around for dinner, the Old Man thought you might be sick."

"Sick ——!" said Cliff. "He knew very well I wouldn't be sick! Did you ever hear of a Naval officer being sick?"

Though he said this boldly, he wondered how he would ever explain himself if he *should* be sick.

"Besides, the mate knew very well I was in here."

The slight man looked grave.

"The mate's sick himself," said he, "he's in his berth. He was taken quite suddenly, right after breakfast."

"That's too bad!" cried Cliff. "Do you know what the matter is with him?"

"No, but it's not very serious. Cramps of some kind. Something he's eaten ashore probably. He'll work out of it by the time we get into deep water. Well, come and eat. I'm the second officer. My name's Lundstrom."

"I'm glad to know you," said Cliff. "My name's Crocker."

They shook hands.

"You're not an Annapolis man, are you?" said the other man. "I don't see any ring."

"No," said Cliff, uneasily. "I'm not."

They went forward to the saloon, however, and the second officer asked no more embarrassing questions.

The saloon was empty, for it was late and dinner had been eaten some time before. The second officer excused himself on plea of some ship's business and left Cliff alone. Cliff ate and fumed inwardly and wondered if the mate were really sick.

"This is a poor way to run a ship," he thought. "Lock a passenger up and then forget about him. That story about some one locking the door by mistake is too thin. The mate locked that door and did it intentionally. Wait till I see him again."

At this moment Cliff happened to see the pantry boy peeking at him through the slide. What little of the boy's face he could see expressed lively dislike. This Cliff attributed to the fact that he was late to dinder, so he made a rapid end and went on deck again.

They were well down the harbor, now, though not out of sight of land.

There are a great many islands and lighthouses in Boston Harbor, and Cliff looked at them with much interest. He went forward to where he could see down into the well deck. This was his first real view of the ship and he was rather surprized to find her so small.

The steamer was a freighter, of the type known as "three island," that is, with forecastle, superstructure, and poop raised above the deck level. She had no crow's nest on the mast, but carried her lookout instead in a little canvas-protected enclosure on the wheelhouse roof. The deck forward and aft of the superstructure had high bulwarks, hence the name of well deck. It looked very dirty and uninviting to Cliff. The well was filled with winches, derrick booms and the raised hatch coaming.

Men in dirty dungarees were battening down and more were carrying some manila gear aft to stow it for the voyage. Cliff let the breeze from the sea blow in his face, and inhaled deeply. Then he watched the men again.

They were sturdy, well set up sailors for the most part, though some were obviously dock rats. Cliff remarked that the greater proportion of them seemed to be Swedes or Danes or some northern race, for they had fair hair and round faces. There was only one that showed signs of liquor, a great lumbering bear of a man with a week's beard on his purple face, clad in dirty corduroy pants, all daubed with red lead and wearing a sailor's jumper that was so dirty it shone.

This man was battening down the hatch and making a poor job of it. He fell flat on his face time and gain and then, getting up, would fall over backward. At last he sat down on the hatch coaming, and finally fell backwards on to the hatch cover. There he lay, wobbling with the motion of the ship, and no one paid him any heed.

NOW Cliff was not a sailor and all that lay before him meant nothing. All he could see was some men that were moving about and it seemed to him that they were not working very swiftly nor very efficiently. If he had been what his uniform indicated, he would have known at once that something on this ship was very wrong.

Those hatches should have been battened long ago, those wires slatting back and forth should have been unrove—they were topping lifts—and there should have been some one in authority down there putting a little ginger into the men.

Moreover, there was a good stiff wind blowing in Cliff's face, so that he had to hold to the rail to keep from being blown away. The ship was not going ahead fast enough to raise all that breeze; some of it was east wind. A sailor would have stepped in and had a peep at the glass, but all a glass meant to Cliff was something to drink out of.

Cliff loitered about the deck, went aft and looked into the after well deck, climbed a ladder to the boat deck and inspected the boats. He noted that here there was some attempt at cleanliness and good appearance, for, the falls—the ropes that held the boats to the davits—had all been painted, again and again, so that they looked very smooth and solid, and hardly like rope at all.

It is a strange thing, but true, that in cargo boats, usually so chary of paint, it is a very common thing to find boat falls and gripes well painted. Cliff looked up at the wheelhouse and noticed a painted board bearing the words:

WEST SAUGUS

"That's a good American name," he thought. "I saw that on the boats, too, but I don't see why they have to stick it on all the boats and the life preservers and buckets and everything else. Maybe it's so no one can steal anything."

While he marveled on this the whistle gave a short toot, and the ship slowed to a stop. There was a smaller vessel swinging at anchor a short distance away and in between the two a rowboat, doing a great deal of ducking and bowing.

Cliff had a panicky thought that this might be some kind of inspection on account of the war and he was more startled when he saw a man in shore clothes come down the bridge ladder, go below and then reappear on the well deck, where, settling his derby firmly on his head, he swung himself over the side and out of sight.

Cliff, his hair on end, ran down to the next deck, where he could see better, and was horrified to find the man swinging from a frail rope ladder at the water's edge. The rowboat had come in quite close to the ship's side and, as a wave raised it in air, the man in it gave his oars a swirl, the boat shot forward, and the man with the derby stepped lightly into the boat and sat down. Then he settled his derby again and the boat started back to the smaller vessel.

"Must be a doctor," thought Cliff.

After that the ship got under weigh and began to go up and then down again, as she met the heave of the open sea. A clamor arose from the well deck forward and Cliff, looking over the rail, could see that his friend of the morning, Lundstrom, was raging about there.

The man who had been drunk on the hatch was being sluiced down with the wash deck hose and farther forward, where the deck raised again, that is, on the forecastle head, a man was whirling something about his head and then throwing it into the sea. Then he would call something in a wailing voice.

"He's heaving the lead, sure enough," thought Cliff.

He recognized that action, at least, from the sea stories he had read. The young man took another turn about the deck, remarked that the setting sun was very white and brilliant, and then went to his room to prepare for supper. He wondered whether he should wait to be called or go himself and sit down.

He finally decided to wait on deck and if some one came for him, well and good. If not, and he saw people going into the saloon, he would go in himself. He was paying for his passage and need not be shy about eating.

Now the usual son of wealth is not shy about eating or anything else, but it will be remembered that Cliff was put out to graze during the summer and in earning his keep during that period, he had found that the forward man that burst in where angels feared to tread, very frequently came out again on his nose.

So then, when Cliff was among strangers, especially such strangers as these seafaring men, he moved carefully and slowly until he found what the proper actions should be.

He waited some time and there seemed to be no signs of life about the saloon. Finally a man opened the door and hooked it back. No one showed up, so after a time Cliff gathered his courage, and went forward to the saloon. There was one man in there eating, but as all the places were set, Cliff thought he might go in himself.

"Good evening," said he, stepping over the weather board. "May I sit down anywhere?"

"Evening," answered the other man. "Sure, sit down where you want. I'm engineer. Glad to know you. Name's Haarvig. Sit down. Help yourself."

Cliff sat down and proceeded to eat. The other man was quite old, with his hair turned a steel gray and his face deeply furrowed. He passed things to Cliff, urged him to try the greens, asked if the meat was tough, sent out for another can of milk for Cliff's tea, and more than exerted himself to be agreeable.

"Is this system of driving a ship by motor any good?" asked the engineer.

"Well," remarked Cliff, "I don't know. It hasn't been tried out enough. I really haven't followed it."

"No," said the engineer, "probably not. A deck officer wouldn't. You should, though. I don't want to advise a Navy man, but you should know engines. Yes, I think that motor drive would be good. It would save room and that is what cargo vessels need. Maybe it cost too much.

"I knew you were a deck officer. When I heard you were aboard I said to myself, 'If he is an engineer, he will be down to see me.' But you didn't come. Perhaps you would like to, anyway. The engines are in fine shape. Do you think I could stay with her if the Navy takes her over?" he asked wistfully.

"Golly," thought Cliff, "I forgot I was supposed to be inspecting her for the Navy. I'd better poke around in the morning."

Aloud he said:

"I must have a look at the engines tomorrow. I can't promise you that you'll stay on her, but I think it would be arranged. I'll see what I can do."

The engineer was all smiles.

"That's fine," he cried. "You will see that I have took good care of those engines. I know them, you see; I never let them wrack and strain. A new man might ruin them. Well, I must go down. When my second comes up, you must talk to him. He is a fine young man. He is thinking of going in the Navy now, himself. Good night. Mr. Lundstrom should be down very soon. He is late tonight."

THE engineer went out. Cliff saw then why he had not noticed this man come in. He had entered from the starboard door. Cliff ate alone for a while.

Wasn't that a bright idea, he thought, to have him wear a uniform!

All these officers were so polite to him, the engineer had treated him better than if he had been the owner. And he could go all over the ship. wherever he wanted to go, engine room or bridge, and be a welcome guest. He had a moment's twinge of conscience at the thought that he was the worst kind of a civilian and that he had no right to impose on these men.

Suppose they should meet him again some time! Well, he hadn't said he was a Naval officer. The captain and the mate had said that.

"By the way," said Cliff aloud, "where's the captain? I haven't seen him since yesterday."

"You call, sir?" asked the mess boy, putting his head through the slide.

"No, I didn't," answered Cliff. "I was wondering where the captain was."

"He'll be down any minute, sir," said the boy, and went back to his plates.

The second engineer was the next man to come in.

"Hello," he said, "where's everybody?"

"I don't know," answered Cliff. "Do you know how the mate is?"

"No, he can't be very bad, or we wouldn't have left port. I suppose the skipper's on the bridge. It's coming on to be nasty and he's always smelling around when we go out anyway. I expect he's wild with an officer short. Seen the engines yet?"

"No," said Cliff. "I'm a deck officer, you know. I'm not very interested in them, although I ought to be. The Navy's got motor drive in its mind now any way."

Cliff was learning.

"You want to talk to the chief," said the other man. "He's looking for some one to chew the fat with about motor drive. He says——"

The saloon door flew open with a bang. A young man that Cliff had not seen before —he was a quartermaster—jumped in, his eyes bulging.

"The mate's dead!" he blurted.

The engineer looked aghast. The mess boy came to the door of his den and looked on with open mouth.

"What'd the Old Man say?" cried the engineer.

The quartermaster came nearer and leaned his hands on the table.

"The skipper's took sick," he said, "just like Mr. Jacobs was, and they're just now carryin' him below."

The ship socked into a wave, there was a rattle from the plates in the pantry and a chorus of creaks from the bulkhead. The mess boy wiped his hands on his apron.

Cliff felt the floor pushing against his feet, and then suddenly it was swept away beneath him. What a rotten tasting cigaret! And what a —— greasy hole this was! He looked at the mess boy, his back against the door jamb, balancing to the heave of the ship. He looked at the quartermaster leaning on his hands staring down at the engineer, and the engineer looking up at the quartermaster. The floor sunk away from his feet again. Then the engineer turned and smiled at Cliff.

"I guess it's up to you to take charge," he said. "The second mate's no navigator and it's going to be a dirty night."

The saloon slanted, throwing Cliff forward against the table. He said no word. It behooved him to seek the open air, and he sought it at once. Outside it was dark and wet, and the sea was very near. Cliff hung to the rail, heedless of his new uniform with its shiny lace, and the soaking it was getting from spray.

After a while he felt better. Sea-sickness allows no room for thought, but as his head cleared and his stomach settled, he began to remember what the quartermaster had said. Then he remembered what the engineer had said, too.

A man stumbled down the bridge ladder and went into the saloon. Through the door Cliff could see the quartermaster and the engineer still engaged in excited conversation. The last comer came out again and, glancing about, saw Cliff and crossed to him.

"The captain is dead, sir," he said, "and the second mate sent to ask you if you'd be kind enough to come to the bridge."

CLIFF followed the messenger to the bridge. They climbed the ladders into the black night and Cliff felt very sick indeed. His mind was sick, now. After all his happy sensations of a short time before, after all his patting himself on the back when he thought of how all aboard had put themselves out to be agreeable, after his swelling around in that glittering braided uniform, he must creep in to that second mate and confess that all he knew about a ship was that it went up and down in a most unpleasant manner.

When they got to the bridge the wind nearly took his head from his shoulders. There was a man there, walking up and down behind the weather screen, but he paid no heed to the newcomers.

Cliff cast a hurried glance into the night, and noted how the black bow pointed heavenward one moment, and then came down like a great knife the next—*whop!*—and spray leaped high over the forecastle. They went into the after part of the house and the messenger left Cliff alone.

It was a small room. The second mate was sitting there, but he stood up when Cliff entered.

"Good evening, sir," he said. "I'm very sorry to have to tell you that the captain and mate are both dead, and that you are senior officer aboard. The bosun is relieving me on the bridge and if you have no further commands for me, or unless you'd like some information regarding the ship, I'd like to go below, I've been on watch since dinner, and have had no supper."

"Do you know where we are?" asked Cliff, sparring for time, while he thought of some way to inform the second mate that he was mistaken in thinking Cliff was a Naval officer.

"I haven't much idea," said the mate. "The skipper was taking his departure when he had his first attack about an hour ago. I should say we were in a nice position to pile up on Cape Cod if anything goes wrong."

Cliff very nearly asked where the captain was taking his departure to, but he refrained. He decided that the less he said, the better.

There seemed to be no opening for his avowal right then. The second mate was very nervous, one might even say frightened. His eyes were anywhere but on Cliff. He kept clenching and unclenching his hands and pursing his thin lips.

"Why can't we turn around and go back?" asked Cliff.

"My ——! No!" cried the mate. "You could do it with a battleship, but not with this herring box. With the wind and sea as it is, it would be just like jumping overboard. And if we should go a little wide—farewell! There are more wrecks from Nauset to Chatham than on all the rest of the Atlantic coast."

"We won't hit anything if we keep the way we're going now, will we?"

"Nothing but the North Atlantic, unless some other ship gets in front of us."

"All right," said Cliff. "You have your supper and then we'll see what's to be done."

"Very good, sir," said the mate.

He picked up his cap, took down his oilskins from a hook and went out into the wet night.

Cliff sat down on the leather lounge and looked about him. This was a pretty nice room for a second mate. The lamp over the big table was shaded, so that the outlines of the place were quite dim, but the more Cliff looked, the more he began to think that this was not the second mate's room, but that of some kind of office.

There was a door on each side that went out to the deck and one in the right hand corner that went forward. The big table stretched from the door clear to the other side of the room. It had a great many long flat drawers under it and at the end nearest the door in the bulkhead, a kind of a glass well.

Cliff walked to the door in the bulkhead, opened it and looked through. The other room was pitch dark, save for a tiny glow of light in the middle. There was a row of glass windows across the front of the room, with rain beating on the panes and running down in wavy lines. The shadow of a man passed back and forth before the windows.

Cliff stepped into the room and walked over to that tiny glow of light. It came from a huge brass bird-bath effect, in which was a compass, not the ordinary kind that Cliff had seen before, but a huge thing with a tremendous star in the center that had a very great number of black and white points.

Just visible in the light was a man, standing behind a ridiculously small wheel, not much bigger than an automobile wheel. He said no word. His eyes were on the compass card and on the ship's head, alternately.

The rain *swooshed* on the windows and Cliff shuddered slightly. Then he turned and went back into the other room.

AS HE crossed the threshold, his eye lighted on a shelf over the leather lounge. There were books on that shelf, almost a dozen. He inspected their labels. "Atlantic Coast Pilot," "West Indian Pilot," "International Rules of the Road at Sea," "Navigation Simplified," "Nautical Almanac," "Seaman's Guide," were some of the titles.

Cliff took down the Seaman's Guide and began to turn the pages. For the last few minutes, a riotous voice had been crying within him, but he had dared not listen to it. Now Fate seemed to have taken him in hand.

"Why is it necessary to tell on yourself?" asked the voice.

"Don't be a fool," said Cliff aloud, "you never were on a real ship in your life!"

"Didn't you ever bone for an examination?" asked the voice. "Here are all the books. Go to it!"

"Gee, I had some glimmering of what I was studying, though," said Cliff.

"And what a story you can tell when you get back; that you took command of an ocean going steamship and sailed her into port!" continued the inner voice.

"Now let's be calm," said Cliff. "Let's have a look at this thing. Let's think this over."

In the book a diagram of a ship caught his eye. He regarded it interestedly. Then a chapter heading captured his interest. "Bridge Routine," it said.

Cliff began to read there and he read with a great deal of interest for some time. He learned that he was in the wheelhouse, and that the part of the house he was in was the chartroom. The dim light in the other room was the binnacle and the man outside was the watch officer. Very interesting. He turned the pages to see how long the chapter was and a paragraph fairly yelled at him to read it.

> The master (it began) if he be really alive to the dignity of his position, will not go on the bridge except in entering or leaving port, or in time of emergency, nor will he have aught to do with the ship's business, save through the medium of his first officer, to whom he must give all commands, and whom he must hold responsible for all slackness, soldiering and unseamanlike performance of duty, at sea or in port, whether the chief officer be aboard or ashore.

"That settles it," cried Cliff. "I'll do it· We'll run into the first harbor and it will only be for a day or so, and I'll have a lot of fun. I won't need to do a thing but rip that Lundstrom man up the back regularly."

Then he had another thought.

"Gee, it's like being on a desert island and building a house from the wreck and all that sort of thing. Here are the books and I ought to be able to learn navigation enough to make a showing in a few hours."

He considered a bit, but could see no difficulty in the way. He had studied mathematics as far as calculus, here were books to tell him how, and he had plenty of time to learn.

They were out of port, and he would not have to go on the bridge until they made port again. Why not go clear to South America with the ship? By that time he'd be a shark on navigation. Meanwhile he would read avidly.

By and by he came to some directions for the proper method of relieving the watch.

The relief would come at eight bells. It was easy to know when that was for there was a clock in the chartroom that tinkled the bells.

Well, the watch would be changed at midnight, and he would meanwhile get everything down cold, and observe how it was done. If they didn't do it as the book said, he'd go out and make a few remarks.

He thought of some of the books of the sea he had read—"Midshipman Easy," "Frank Mildmay," "Swiss Family Robinson." Too old. They didn't do things that way now. How about the "Sea Wolf?" Good. He'd be a sea wolf.

"They'd better stand by when I'm around," he cried exultingly.

He was learning. Those words had a fine salty tang!

"They'd better stand by," he repeated.

Then he applied himself to the book, writing down what he should say and committing it to memory. When the clock struck six bells he got up and began to rehearse, using the table as the officer of the watch and the couch as the relief.

"Now then," said Cliff, "watch officer, what vessels are in sight? None? Very good. What's the course?"

There was a dull silence. The book said that the officer in charge should pass the course, but Cliff did not know what that meant, so how would he know if it was being done correctly?

"Back to the book," he said, "there's more to this than I thought. Nothing like a rehearsal to being out weak points."

He hunted through the index, but without success. He ruffled the pages, but there was no chapter on "Course," nor any diagrams showing how it should be found.

He did, however, discover an exposition of the compass, including directions for adjusting same. Here there were page after page of heavy formulas and soggy mathematics.

"Yes, indeed," said Cliff, "there's certainly a lot more to this than I thought."

THE continued to read bravely and the hour for changing the watch went by unnoticed. At the end of the chapter on compasses, he discovered the following words:

> The foregoing will be taken as but a small portion of the fascination that may be found in studying the compass. While the chapter has been inserted as a sort of beacon to the enterprising and ambitious mariner, to point out the way to a most delightful recreation, it is not intended that every officer should adjust his own compass. He will find that it will be a saving of time to himself and of money to his owners, if he has a professional compass adjuster perform that operation for him.

"Well, wouldn't that make you foam at the mouth!" cried Cliff. "Ah, well, I didn't understand a word of it, anyway. Now I'd better decide which is the most important and read that chapter. Otherwise I could read this thing until the cows come home and not know a thing when I'd finished. Umm, let's see. 'Stowage.' Nix. 'Handling Boats in Surf.' May be good later, if I wreck the old sardine can. 'Docking.' Doggone it, isn't there anything worthwhile in this book? What else is there up there?"

He arose and inspected the shelf again. Lecky's "Wrinkles" he put by, and "The Marine Engineer's Handbook," but when he came to "Questions and Answers, Examination for Master's and Mate's Licenses," he seized it down and plunged into it. The watch changed again and the portholes were turning gray when some one rapped smartly at the door.

"Come in!" called Cliff, whisking the book out of sight.

A wet head was thrust through the door.

"Sailin' ship on the port bow!" cried this man.

In rather a panic, Cliff seized his cap and ran out to the bridge. "Gee, this is what they call 'Calling the Captain,'" he thought. "For all the good I'll be, they might have saved their breath."

Heavy rain, a wild tumbling sea, gray and threatening, and a very, very wet ship, a black bow, and a red well deck, rising and plunging into the murk. Over the side, very near and looking several times larger than she really was, was a four-masted schooner, slamming along with the very evident intent of crossing the *West Saugus'* bows.

A man in oilskins with the water running from his face was standing near a tall, clock-like machine, from which projected a handle. The canvas cover of this thing had just been removed and was blowing about in the wind at the end of a lanyard.

Cliff licked his lips. The two men were looking at him with tremendous anxiety and he saw that they expected him to say something. The distance between the two ships was rapidly growing less.

Try as he would, no thought would come to Cliff as to what to do. He had spent the night in reading and yet the first time he was called upon to do something, he was unable to do it. He cleared his throat.

"Stand by," he roared.

It was the only thing he could say and be sure that it was couched in proper terms. A bell clanged and Cliff nearly jumped out of his uniform. Then he saw that the man in oilskins had moved the handle of the clock.

"Why, that's the engine room telegraph!" thought Cliff.

"Shut her down!" he cried.

Any fool would know enough to do that. The bell clanged again and Cliff saw the indicator move to "Stop." He saw that the next division on the indicator was "Slow, Astern," then "Half," then "Full."

"Well, let it go as it is for a minute," he thought. "What's the other boat doing?"

He looked away from the indicator and at the other ship.

Golly! The other ship was doing nothing but approach with express-train speed.

"Full astern," called Cliff, reading from the indicator.

Clang! went the telegraph. The whistle roared thrice and Cliff's heart nearly stopped beating.

"Who did that?" he yelled, but no one heard him.

He looked sickly at the other ship. She was so close that he could see her bow wave, and the hoops on her masts. She was still coming at the same speed. Cliff tried to gage the distance between the two vessels and as his eye went forward of the *Saugus*, he yelled in good earnest.

The *Saugus'* bow was swinging to starboard, as if she were trying her very best to collide with the other ship and intended to cut across her bow in order to do so. Cliff's throat closed up like an old-fashioned purse when the string at the top is pulled and he could say nothing.

He weakly waved his arm to swing the bow to port, so that he might pass astern of the other ship if such a thing were possible. Then, with all the sensations of an automobilist in a wet car track, with both brakes set and the car sliding, Cliff waited for the inevitable crash.

THE *West Saugus* continued to go forward, though not so rapidly as before, and her bow began to swing back, then slightly to port. The man at the wheel had seen Cliff's signal and put the helm hard starboard, that is, swung the rudder to port. After that there was nothing to do but count heart beats.

The schooner seemed to rush down on the *Saugus*, and the *Saugus* seemed to be drawn toward the schooner by some irresistible attraction. The two vessels, rising and falling on the seas, seemed to be dancing up and down at each other, like two roosters before they engage in combat.

Cliff kept his eyes over the *West Saugus'* bow. The schooner's jibboon rushed by, so close that he could see the links in her marting-gale stays, then bowsprit, bow, forecastle, foremast, main mast, mizzen mast, poop, spanker, and, when Cliff had decided that the *West Saugus* would hit the other ship about in the center of her cabin trunk, she swung past and he could see open water over her stern.

Cliff ran to the starboard end of the bridge and looked down. He could see a section of poop deck, a man at the wheel looking up at him with a very white and sober face, another man with his hands in his pockets, white water where the schooner's wake and the *West Saugus'* bow wave met, an open companionway and a third man, who seemed to be clad only in his shirt. The third man stood in the companionway and waved his arms. The man's voice came faintly up to him.

"Yew durn chucklehead," cried the man, "I'll dirty yewr card fer this. Where be yew a goin' tew with that old blubber pot? Do yew think yewr runnin' a ferry boat? Where'd yew larn navigation?"

Other things he said, that were more profane than pertinent.

"Pickle your jaw, you old Jonah," cried Cliff. "Think you own the ocean?"

The other man leaped up and down in a frenzy, but the ships were too far apart for his reply to be audible. Cliff heaved a sigh of relief. Then he noticed that the bow was swinging to starboard again and that the *Saugus* was beginning to roll.

Her engines, still being reversed, her way had gradually been lessened, until she was beginning to fall off to starboard. Panic surged at Cliff again. He threw a helpless look at the indicator and the man at the telegraph, seeing his look, reported—

"Full astern, sir."

"Full ahead," answered Cliff, that being the obvious reply to make and the helm being still hard starboard.

As the *Saugus* gathered way she began to swing to port again. Then Cliff remembered that he must give some order about the wheel. What should he say—"Straight ahead! Hard aport"—what? How was this cursed flapping back and forth of that bow to be stopped?

Then he remembered that he was the captain and that, the emergency having passed, he could very well leave the man on watch to straighten her out.

"Put her on her course," said he to the man by the telegraph, and then he fled into the charthouse, where he cast himself on to the leather lounge.

"You fool, fool, fool!" he cried to himself, and the reaction from the strain setting in, he shook and trembled for the better part of an hour.

After that he felt very tired and sleepy, and he remembered that he had not been to bed as yet. Thereupon he unhooked his blouse collar and stretched out on the couch, where he fell asleep without difficulty.

POUNDING on the panels waked Cliff as if it had been the call of Judgment. He cowered mentally before he was half awake. He had visions of going out on that wet bridge and dodging around another big schooner, or of meeting an ocean greyhound head on, while he looked helplessly at the telegraph and tried to think of what to say next.

"Come in," he called, hooking his blouse and looking around for his cap.

The second mate came in, hat in hand.

"Seven bells, sir," he said.

Cliff, by looking at the clock, saw that it was seven-thirty. He had a feeling that this was the hour when he gave out the day's orders or something like that, so he rubbed his head to think of an order to give.

If he could only get the mate out while he consulted a book! But the mate still stood motionless, the water dripping from his oilskins. Ah, a thought! He could stall for a little time by sending for his breakfast.

"Is there a bell around here for a messenger?" asked Cliff.

"There's a quartermaster standing by in the wheelhouse," answered the mate. "I'll rap on the panel."

He pounded on the door with his fist. Scrambling sounds. Then the door swung open. The man on the other side was the hulking seaman that had been so drunk the day before. He had shaved, though, and his complexion was very clear and healthy looking for a drunkard's. His face also, thought Cliff, seemed too intelligent for a common seaman's.

"Didja rap, sir?" said the seaman in a harsh voice.

"Skip down to the galley and bring me some coffee," said Cliff.

The seaman withdrew and they heard the bang of the wheelhouse door.

"What's on your mind, Mr. Lundstrom?" asked Cliff.

The mate looked a bit surprized, and Cliff reflected that he had perhaps said the wrong thing.

"Well, sir," said the mate, "I thought you'd like to look at the ship's papers. Then there's something else. The captain and mate are still aboard."

"That's so," said Cliff, his heart beginning to take on weight. "What do you think we'd better do?"

"Well, it's really not for me to say," answered the mate.

"Uh!" grunted Cliff, inwardly cursing the mate's diffidence.

He thought rapidly. The big sailor knocked and then entered with coffee and a tray of breakfast. While this was being laid out on the big desk, Cliff had still more time to think. A bright idea occurred to him.

"Now," began Cliff, "the responsibility is mine, of course, but I'd like to have you give me your opinion on whatever I do. Things are done differently in the Navy than in the merchant service, and I don't want to do anything that will lose money for the owners of this vessel. I want you to speak freely."

The mate's face lighted up, and he seemed about to laugh aloud. Then it sobered as if a curtain had been pulled down over his emotions.

"I suppose he's flattered at my offering to listen to his advice," thought Cliff.

"I think we had better hold our course," said the mate, "rather than try to run into any port. It's getting thicker and the sea is beginning to work up in real style. I don't think we can make any try for a port until we locate our position. We were heading east 10 south, and the course has been the same unless it was changed since I left the bridge. We might work our position by dead reckoning, but it would be difficult."

"What ought to be done with the bodies?" asked Cliff.

"Sea burial," said the mate.

This matter, Cliff decided, was one for thought, so he proceeded to contemplate the bulkhead. He was not thinking of sea burial at all. He was thinking over what he had read during the night.

The coffee had awakened him thoroughly and a few drags from a cigaret made a new man of him. His mind would not buckle down to its task, however. He kept thinking of the slight burr there was in Mr. Lundstrom's speech and how it probably was more noticeable because Mr. Lundstrom was very obviously under a great strain.

"Now," thought Cliff, "stand by. I'm going to fire a few rounds of grape!"

"Mr. Lundstrom," began Cliff, "how does it happen that there were only two navigators on this ship? Isn't it the law that there shall be three licensed mates?"

"Well," said the mate, grinning, "that's the law, but since the war it hasn't been rigidly enforced, and even overlooked since the United States got into it. We've got three mates, or we had three, and we've all got licenses, but we didn't take any examination for them.

"I bought mine all made and I think the third mate got his in the same place. Mr. Jacobs did the navigating and we stood watch of course. The bosun stood watch for me last night while I went to supper, and then the third mate and I stood watch and watch all night. I'd have the mid-watch anyway. The bosun isn't any better than a lookout. The third mate isn't, either, for that matter, although he knows the rules and the whistle signals."

"How do they run the tricks at the wheel?" asked Cliff.

"Why the skipper used to have a quartermaster in the wheelhouse all the time, but one of the foremost hands had to steer half the watch. That's what that big man was doing in the wheelhouse. He was standing by to take a trick. No, I guess he steered the first half of the watch, otherwise he'd be at the wheel now."

"I bet he was at the wheel when I went on the bridge," said Cliff. "He's a good man. We took the paint off a four poster's stern. I'll bet he's been in the Navy."

The mate grinned and Cliff was glad to see that his calling the schooner a four poster had not been amiss. He remembered that in some story or book he had read that a four-masted ship had been so termed.

"We'll have to dig up another mate somewhere," said Cliff. "We can't have you standing watch and watch. Do the crew know what has happened?"

"Not officially, but they probably know it all right."

"Well, let's look over the papers, and then we'll inspect the ship."

"I'm supposed to relieve the bridge at eight bells, sir," answered the mate.

"Well, let it go, then," said Cliff. "It can wait. We'll muster the crew after dinner, and appoint some one to be fourth mate."

"And hadn't we better bury the two men, sir?"

"Yes," said Cliff. "We can do that. Let's do it soon; the quicker the better."

"Very good, sir," said the mate.

"That's all," said Cliff, and the mate withdrew.

"Now," said Cliff, "back to the books so I can see how to take over a command and what to say, and how to bury at sea."

He read for an hour or so, alternating betweeen "Questions and Answers" and the "Seaman's Guide," but he found nothing about burying at sea.

"Maybe they'll make the arrangements," decided Cliff, "and all I'll have to do will be to read the burial service."

After a time he fell asleep again, his head on the desk, and did not awaken until the mate rapped on the door at eight bells.

"The third mate reports all ready," said Mr. Lundstrom. "The men have been mustered. I've turned over the bridge and if you'll come down, sir, we can go ahead with the service."

"Are you going to bury them now?" cried Cliff.

"Yes, sir. We'll get it over with before dinner."

THINKING it was a rather cold-blooded thing to do, Cliff hurried down the ladder and went forward to the break of the superstructure. The crew had been mustered and were standing about in the pelting rain, some in oilskins, some with only sou'westers, others in naught but their dungarees.

Cliff went down the ladder to the well deck and took his stand at the head of a grating that rested on the bulwark. The second mate handed him a prayer book and the crew, coming in closer about the grating, uncovered.

Cliff looked at them. They kept their eyes fixed on the deck, looked overhead or up at the bridge. The rain ran down their faces in little streams and dripped from their bedraggled hair. Cliff wanted to cry. The ship's ensign was spread on the grating and the ship's house flag alongside it.

Probably the ship had only one extra ensign and it was not big enough to cover all there was on the grating that should be covered.

Cliff fumbled at the book, trying to separate the wet pages. The deck slid away beneath him, there was a roll of thunder, and a large portion of the north Atlantic rolled over the port rail, leaped across the deck and brought up against the bulwarks with a tremendous crash. There was a clanging of water ports, opening and closing.

Cliff, half drowned, arose from the starboard waterway and picked up his cap. The crew were clambering down from holds in the rigging, from the ladders on the forecastle and superstructure, and others were getting up from the deck, wringing the water from their faces. The grating with its sad burden was gone, ensigns and all. Cliff leaped on a bollard and looked off over the leaping seas. Nothing but gray water with streaks of white, and wave summits beaten into spray.

Another sea tumbled aboard. The wind was backing around to the north and beginning to drive the ocean into the ship over the port rail. The crew stood about helplessly, wondering what to do, yearning for the dry forecastle, but unwilling to go as long as Cliff was on the well deck.

Cliff was not to be driven away, for, though the sea had snatched the bodies, he intended that they should have Christian burial just the same. The second mate, who had clutched the ensign as the sea rolled aboard, was going up the ladder, rolling it up.

"Come back here!" called Cliff.

The second mate came back.

"Give me that flag," said Cliff and, putting the ensign over his arm, he opened the book again and proceeded to read the Order for the Burial of the Dead. When he came to the part that says, "We therefore commit his body to the deep," he threw the ensign over the side.

When he had finished with the service, Cliff stood looking out over the sea for a moment. The rain drove almost horizontally, the smoke from the *Saugus'* stack streamed down wind into the sea, where the gray curtain of the sky met the leaping combers.

Suddenly, some distance away, the ensign appeared, spread wide on the slope of a hurrying sea. It swept rapidly up to the crest, seemed to flutter a moment, and then was gone down the other side, where it was lost in the gray wilderness to leeward.

Cliff looked at the second mate. Mr. Lundstrom's eyes were on the ocean, directed to that quarter where the ensign had disappeared, and his face was whiter than the streaks of foam that swirled and twisted alongside.

"Have the men line up on the upper deck," said Cliff, and then stood aside while the mate herded the crew up the ladder and then lined them against the rail.

Here, in the lee of the house, they would not be so wet, and Cliff could make himself heard without cracking his throat.

"Is there any one here that has held a mate's license?" asked Cliff.

The men all eyed him soberly but said no word.

"Has any one tried to get a license?"

No answer.

"There's a chance for some one to be fourth mate if he'll only speak up," said Cliff to encourage them.

The men were not encouraged. Their eyes shifted about and their feet slopped on the wet deck as they moved them uneasily. They looked at him in sidewise glances or from under their eyebrows, but they did not seem eager for promotion.

Cliff's eye fell on the big man, the seaman who had brought him his breakfast. As if encouraged by the young man's eye, this seaman spoke up.

"I used to be captain of a towboat once," said he. "I knows the rules o' the road."

A breeze of snickering swept the men.

"An' furthermore," continued the big sailor, stepping out and facing the crew, "I c'n lick any many on this wagon, bar none. An' now I'm a officer, I callates to do it often. I gits the billet, don't I?" said he, appealing to Cliff.

Cliff could not help grinning if he were hung for it.

"You get it," he said.

Then to the crew—

"That's all, men."

They clumped silently down the ladder and went forward.

"Have some one take my things into the chart room, Mr. Lundstrom," said Cliff, "and the new mate can move into my old room."

He turned to the new officer.

"What's your name?"

"Curran, sir."

"Well, Mr. Curran, Mr. Lundstrom has stood your watch this morning. You'd better take the bridge now and let the third mate have a watch below. Then you can take your regular watch tonight. Mr. Lundstrom, after dinner we'll go over the ship's papers and make an inventory of the captain's effects."

CLIFF mounted to the chart room and, after his trunk had been brought in, changed to dry clothes and sent his wet uniform to the engine room to be hung over the boilers. He took no joy in his position any longer.

He began to remember that the ship would have to come to port some time and when it did, he would have a serious time. He had a feeling that the burial of the captain and mate had been a little premature. But what else could be done with them? They certainly couldn't stay aboard indefinitely.

"I'd better get going on navigation," said Cliff to himself, "because we can't run forever without finding out where we are. We're sailing for South America, not Africa. Maybe I can learn enough to alter the course, anyway. Why, any fool ought to be able to do that, though.

"All I have to say is: 'Change the course to south.' We won't hit anything but the South Pole. Then after I've got an idea of how the thing works, I can do things a little finer. Well, stand by, I'm going to change course."

He opened the door into the wheelhouse and stepped in.

This was the first time that Cliff had been in the wheelhouse in the daytime and he looked about with curiosity. A row of glass shutters stretched across the front, and above the shutters was a line of pigeonholes from one bulkhead to the other.

In each hole was a flag with the name of the flag painted beneath in black.

"Br. Ensgn, Ice, Doctor, Police, No. 5, Cuba," Cliff read.

In each corner forward was a small table or desk, the wheel and binnacle in the center, and then another row of pigeonholes against the after bulkhead. These were International Code Flags, for each had a letter of the alphabet beneath it.

One side of the after bulkhead bore diagrams of situations arising when vessels met head on and the other side had a chart of North Atlantic steamship tracks.

Cliff looked into the binnacle. Then he looked at the man at the wheel, who paid no attention to him. Cliff debated whether to tell the man at the wheel, or the officer of the watch and decided on the latter course. He opened the chart house door and stepped out.

There were two men on the bridge, the fourth officer, Curran, and another man, who was standing by to take the wheel when it should come his turn. The watch officer was on the weather side of the bridge and touched the wet junk of cloth that he was wearing for a hat when Cliff appeared.

"Change the course to south at three bells," said Cliff.

"Very good, sir," said Curran, and as Cliff turned to leave he spoke again. "Beg pardon, sir, but could I have a look inter the slop chest when I comes off watch? I haven't no oilskins and I'm a bit cold without 'em."

"Yes, surely," said Cliff. "That's too bad. Can't you borrow some?"

"Well, no, sir," said Mr. Curran, displaying his stained and yellow teeth with a gap in them as big as a cargo port. "They ain't no one aboard of my tonnage."

"I'll fix that right away. Yes, before I have dinner."

Cliff went down to the saloon where the second mate and engineer were eating, and approached Mr. Lundstrom.

"Is there a slop chest aboard?" he asked.

"No," said the second mate. "We're only supposed to work between the States and Central America and the West Indies. When we got this charter we forgot to lay one in. Ships for Central America don't have to carry one."

"Oh," said Cliff. "Then the fourth mate will have to stand his watches without oilskins."

"It'll do him no harm," said the second mate. "He should have brought his own oilskins. We won't have any severe weather this season of the year."

"Well, if we haven't got any, we haven't got any," said Cliff, "and that's all there is to it."

After dinner he and the second mate adjourned to the captain's room. This was in the forward part of the superstructure under the wheelhouse. It had the usual bunk and drawers, a leather lounge, a roll-top desk, rather battered and burned with cigar ends, green curtains on the portholes and a few pictures of ships in which the captain had evidently sailed.

Along the midship's bulkhead was a sort of shelf, built over some lockers, and above the shelf was another row of lockers. The doors of all these lockers were closed with heavy padlocks. In the corner, bolted to the floor, was a small safe on which were painted the words: *Str. West Saugus, Norfolk.*

The safe was closed, but not locked, and swung open easily. The second mate thrust in his hand and brought it out full of heavy envelopes. These he put on the desk and stood back. Cliff began to look over the papers.

"Wouldn't it be well, sir, if I started making the inventory?" asked the mate.

"Yes," said Cliff, "go ahead."

* * *

ON THE lounge was a little pile of things: A watch, cuff links, a purse and some bills, a few letters. These had probably been taken from the captain's pockets. The mate opened a closet and began taking down the things that were in it. Cliff applied himself to the papers.

He had no way of telling if they were in order, or if they were all there, but he did what he could, and looked at them earnestly, at least, so that the mate could not tell that Cliff did not know a thing about them.

First was the clearance that set forth that Thomas Alexander, master, of the *West Saugus*, bound for Buenos Aires, had here entered and cleared his vessel according to law. There were copies of the manifest and the ship's register, that showed that the *West Saugus* was a duly recorded vessel.

There were some more letters, but these were sealed and had addresses on them. Cliff allowed them to stay unopened, for he thought they were probably letters to the ship's agents and none of his business.

"I suppose I ought to take more time over this," thought Cliff. "What's the mate doing?"

Cliff pretended to keep on reading the manifest, but at the same time he began to watch the mate warily from under his eyebrows to see if the mate was watching him. Mr. Lundstrom had evidently forgotten that Cliff was in the room.

He was opening drawers and turning over their contents, going through the pockets of suits, looking behind pictures and giving the impression of seeking something very earnestly, but in vain. His notebook, in which he had so carefully been writing, was now in his pocket unheeded.

He reminded Cliff of a dog shut up in a room behind the walls of which the dog could hear a rat. The mate rushed from one side to the other, pawed madly in a drawer, rushed to the other side, opened the closet, searched the coats hanging there, jumped out again, turned back a picture, ran across the deck and ran his hand under the lounge.

When he had turned back the curtains at the portholes and still found nothing, Cliff spoke.

"Looking for something?" he asked.

The second mate inhaled as does one upon whom a bucket of ice water has suddenly been cast.

"I'm trying to find the keys to that locker," said the mate, pointing to the midship's bulkhead. Cliff swung about in his chair and surveyed that locker again. There were three double doors that closed it, all locked with padlock and chain.

"What's in there?" asked Cliff.

"I don't know," said the mate. "I never saw it opened."

Cliff spent a little more time shuffling the papers and trying to show some knowledge of them, and at last he got to his feet.

"This will do for a while," he said. "I wouldn't live in here on a bet. Let's have the official log and the key, and the agents can take care of the other stuff when we get in."

"How about the mate's effects?"

"Never mind them. We'll lock up his room and leave everything as it is. I don't like this pawing over another man's things. I'm going up to the chartroom and then we'll inspect the ship."

They inspected the ship together. Cliff dived down hot, greasy ladders into the engineroom and hauled the chief engineer from his chair by the gages to inspect the spare shafting in the shaft tunnel.

Cliff got a report on the state of the bunkers, the steam lines, the fire lines and inquired if there was a steam line laid into the paint locker to smother fire.

The chief was aghast, but he did not give vent to his surprize. They went aft and had a look at the steering engine in the after house. It was of the drum type, a very good type for a vessel the size of the *Saugus*.

If for any reason the boilers give out, or the steering engine fails, the hand steering gear can be used by simply stopping the engine and unlocking the hand gear.

They inspected the galleys, the firemen's mess and quarters, and the forecastle and sailors' messroom.

The carpenter, at Cliff's direction, sounded the well, cursing bitterly, for the sounding pipes were on the exposed upper deck and the water washing about wet his rod and washed the chalk off it as fast as he put it on.

Cliff was having the time of his life. He dived back into the port gangway to inspect the firemen's washroom. There were firemen in there taking a shower, for they had just come off watch. One sang cheerily and they laughed and shouted as men will under the sting of a hot shower after hard toil.

"Then out spake the cook of our blooming old boat,
 And a fat little cook was he,
'Oh I care more for my pottles an' my kets
 Than I do for the cold salt sea.' "

The singer sang heartily.

"Ain't our new skipper the dandy, though," he cried, breaking off in his song. "Didn't he raise up —— around this wagon? Join the Navy, boys, an' see the world, and have a nice little laddie in white gloves pokin' around your fireroom twice a watch!"

Some one made derisive reply, inaudible through the sounds of splashing water. The roar of laughter was plainly heard, however, and Cliff withdrew with tingling ears.

"I think I'll go back to my books," said he. "The rain has let up and I'll be squinting at the sun tomorrow."

SO HE dismissed the mate and climbed back to his refuge again. His uniform had dried and some one had brought it up and laid it on the lounge. He climbed into it thankfully, for it seemed to give him courage when he was wearing it. As he buttoned and hooked it together, his hand felt some hard object under the blouse.

"Now what's that?" muttered Cliff.

He thrust his hand into the inside pocket of his blouse and brought out three fat keys, strung on a piece of string.

"Where did those come from?" wondered Cliff. "I don't remember having any keys."

They certainly weren't trunk keys. Keys! Where had some one been hunting for keys? Why, the second mate. He had hunted high and low for the keys of that big locker in the captain's room. Three locks on that locker and here were three keys.

"I'll bet these are the keys to that locker," cried Cliff. "I'll go see, anyway."

He picked up the key of the captain's room and went below with it. When he had entered he went straight to the locker and fitted the key. The padlock turned easily and Cliff swung open the door. The locker was empty. He opened the other two, and they were empty also.

Dumfounded, he began to examine the three recesses to see if he could determine what they had contained.

Across the top of the locker was a board with triangular holes cut in it and at the bottom was another board with a row of wedge-shaped holes. In front of the bottom board and in between each wedge, was a long thin peg, all of them blackened and greasy. Cliff did not know what had been in that locker, but he could give a guess.

That top board was built to hold rifle barrels and that bottom board to hold butts. The pegs were for pistols or revolvers. Cliff's father had just such a rack in his summer camp. The lower half of the lockers opened by releasing a catch in the upper half. Cliff swung open the doors.

"I thought so," he said.

There were two cases of ammunition in there.

"But where are those rifles?" Cliff asked himself.

Obviously they were gone. But who had taken them? Maybe there hadn't been any there when they sailed. The second mate said he had never seen the cabinet opened, so it would be useless to ask him. And how had the keys come into Cliff's blouse pocket?

"I can go crazy here without the slightest effort," said Cliff aloud, "just thinking about the necessary things. If there were rifles here when we sailed, they're all gone now, so why worry about them? As for the keys, there's some simple explanation of that. I may have picked them up in the chart room without thinking.

"Anyway, it's nothing to worry about. I'll just lock the doors again and not let on I know the lockers are empty."

This he did and went aft to supper.

After supper, Cliff got down Lecky's "Wrinkles" and Bowditch's "American Practical Navigator" and applied himself to the science of navigation. The weather was much clearer, although a high sea was still running.

Cliff congratulated himself on the fact that he had not had the slightest twinge of seasickness since the first night aboard, and that he could walk about the heaving decks with as much confidence as he once did about a dance floor.

An hour with Bowditch is enough to daunt the stoutest heart, and at seven bells Cliff took up his cap and went out to take a turn about the decks. He went forward and looked over the rail.

THIS ship, think of it, with all her cargo and her men, was under his command. When he said south they went south and if he said north or east or west, they would go in the indicated direction. In one day he had taken her safely through a near collision and buried the master and mate, to say nothing of changing the course and giving the ship a going-over. And he had never been to sea before.

He drew deep breaths and his heart bounded. This certainly was the biggest adventure he had ever been on, bigger than any his friends had ever undertaken. And he would bring it through successfully, he knew that. He was a very ignorant boy indeed, and well had he spoken when he said he had never been to sea before, or his heart had not been so light.

Cliff went aft, intending to go around the after wheel house and return by the port side. He threaded his way through the winches in the after well deck and mounted the ladder to the poop. The decks were deserted. The men off watch were gaming below, for it was too wet and cheerless to sit about the decks. It was not quite dark.

Cliff turned about the wheel house and nearly fell over the body of a man. He drew back in horror. Then he bent over to see who the man was. It was the new officer, Curran. He slept and snored musically. Cliff considered what to do. It was not seemly for officers to lie about the decks and sleep. Moreover, this man should go on watch very soon.

Cliff stirred him with his foot. The sleeper paid no heed. Cliff stirred harder and finally gave the man a rousing kick.

"Up on your feet," cried Cliff. "Get up! This is no place to sleep! Remember you're an officer, Mr. Curran!"

Mr. Curran rose to his feet. Cliff could could have sworn that the big man was laughing, but in the darkness it might have been a silent snarl; he could not tell. As the mate turned, something gleamed in his pocket.

"If this big bully is packing a gun," thought Cliff, anger boiling within him, "here's where we show him who's boss."

Cliff seized the other's arm.

"What's that in your pocket, Mr. Curran?" he demanded sternly.

Mr. Curran put a slow hand into his pocket and drew out a long flashlight with a nickel base.

"I wuz jest lookin' around," he said with his harsh voice, "an' seein' I had a watch to stand this wild night, I laid me down fer a little caulkin'."

Cliff returned the flashlight and the fourth mate stumbled forward. Cliff stood by the stern rail a moment, wondering whether or not he had made a fool of himself.

Afar on the ocean's rim, where the edges of the seas were like saw teeth in the fading light, a great eye winked at Cliff. Once, twice, thrice, it blinked, then no more.

"Golly!" cried Cliff, "that must be a lighthouse!"

He tore madly forward and climbed to the bridge. The third mate was all attention at once and the quartermaster came leaping with a glass at Cliff's call. Cliff focused the glass astern but could see nothing. He waited a long while, but there were no more flashes.

"Now what do you suppose that was?" he enquired of the third mate, after describing the light.

"Search me," said the mate. "It's outta my depth. Maybe it was some battle wagon signaling. There's a lot of 'em runnin' around now without no home, slammin' along at fifteen knots with no lights. I don't fancy havin' one after me."

The mate stopped and looked suddenly at Cliff, then he held his peace.

"Keep your eye peeled," said Cliff, "and call me if you see anything that looks like a ship."

Then Cliff retired to the chart room.

"I wonder," he thought, sitting down on the lounge, "what that man was doing back there with a flashlight? People don't sleep on wet decks at this time of year. I wouldn't put it beyond him to have been signaling to that ship. I think I'll just sneak down to the captain's room and see if he hasn't a gun tucked away in one of those desk drawers. It might come in handy."

It took Cliff some time to find the switch in the skipper's room. When he had found it and the place was lighted, he searched the desk thoroughly, but could find no sign of a weapon.

"Probably he didn't think he needed one with all those in the locker."

Cliff looked thoughtfully at the big lockers. He looked closer and then leaped from his chair. The padlocks were gone. Cliff swung open the doors. Empty as before. Who had unlocked them? Was there another set of keys? Some one must have a duplicate key to the room.

Cliff felt something scrape under his hand where it rested on the shelf below the locker. He looked. There was a tiny pile of coarse filings there. They were scattered all over the shelf and on the deck. Cliff examined the panels.

Yes, sir! Some one had sawed those padlocks off, for he could see the dents in the panels where the head of the saw had struck, and tiny scratches where the blade had rubbed. Some one had tried to get at the arms.

"I bet they swore a bit when they found the place empty," muttered Cliff.

Then he turned off the light and went back to the chart room.

After a while Cliff turned in. The sea still kicked up strenuously. Much spray came over the bulwarks, but the *Saugus* no longer took green water into her. Cliff made up a bed on the lounge with the blankets from the skipper's room and turned in all standing—that is to say, in his clothes.

"I may have to stand by in the night," he told himself, "and I don't want to get wet doing it."

He went to sleep so suddenly that he did not notice that he had forgotten to turn off the light.

THE following two days Cliff applied himself to his books and gained a very fair knowledge of things, enough to say forward and aft, alow and aloft, and to learn the names of the principal parts of the ship. When Cliff went to bed his fourth night at sea the stars were out, although the heavy sea was still running.

Cliff had been reading in bed, or more properly on the couch, and he had fallen asleep with the book in his hand. He suddenly sat bolt upright on the couch. The terror that seizes a man when he is suddenly awakened by an unknown cause had hold of him.

There was a deathly silence about that he could not understand. The ship heeled far over to starboard and as Cliff swung his feet off the couch, the *Saugus* began to roll terribly.

Feet pounded by outside. Cliff battled his way to the door, but was unable to open it. He turned and clawed his way across the deck to the other door, and after a long struggle got the door open.

The *Saugus* did not roll so heavily now, but rose and fell regularly as the seas ran beneath her. Off to starboard a bright light flamed on the water, now bright and clear as it rose on the crest of a sea, now extinguished save for a dull glow as it slid into a hollow.

A steady throbbing began to beat upon Cliff's ears. Then he understood the silence. The engines had been stopped and had just now been started slowly ahead. From aft came a command.

"Swing her out!"

The davits squealed. A faint jingle came from the bridge as the engines were stopped again.

Another command.

"Lower handsomely."

There was the rapid creak of falls running through blocks, a faint command near the water's edge.

" 'Vast lowering!"

There was a tremendous splash, more rapid commands, and the steady *chop, chop* of oars. The ship began to roll again.

Cliff, still half asleep, and in the state of wildest confusion, stayed where he was by the chart house door. Whatever had happened or was happening, those in charge seemed to know what they were doing and Cliff had no desire to display his own ignorance.

He guessed that a boat had been lowered and Mr. Lundstrom was in charge, for he could detect that burring accent when the mate gave a command. Moreover, after every command the mate would swear at the men in Swedish or Norwegian or whatever it was. It was not English, anyway. Cliff was sure of that.

It did not occur to Cliff that that boat's crew had lowered away and pulled clear very handsomely for men from a cargo boat, who had probably never been in a small boat twice in their lives. As to what that light was out there for, he had not the slightest idea.

A bellow from the bridge made him start.

"Pull for that light, you squareheads! Pull for that light!"

If Neptune himself had thrust his head above the waves, he could not have made more noise. Cliff could not even see the boat, but he could see the light, and noticed that it did not go out of sight so often now. In fact it seemed to float almost calmly.

What had really happened was that the officer of the watch had put out oil, and had swung the ship, so that she made a lee, and being in the trough, of course rolled heavily. Cliff began to think that he had better go on the bridge.

He need not interfere, but he would just lend moral support to whoever was in charge and keep his reputation by saying nothing. Then he decided to stay where he was. If they wanted him, they could send for him.

After a long time the light went out. Some time later, oars chopped alongside and a voice hailed the bridge.

"He's gone," said the voice, "we can't find him."

"Stand by!" roared the man on the bridge. "Forward there! Smartly with the oil!" Then the voice bellowed aft again. "Send all your hands aboard by the sea ladder, except two."

"Aye, aye, sir," faintly. Then—

"All clear, sir."

"Hook on and hoist away!"

Here there were sounds of muttering and anger from the boat. Probably the hands were having trouble in hooking on in spite of the ship's lee and the oil.

Suddenly the mate called, "Hoist away lively!" adding his customary swear.

The falls creaked and shortly after feet pounded on the deck again as the men came up from the deck below to help swing the boat in and secure it. Then Cliff thought it safe to go on the bridge. When he got there it was deserted.

He searched both ends, peered into the wheel house and looked down the ladders. There was nobody there.

"Hullo there!" cried Cliff, "who's on watch here?"

A shadow suddenly appeared around the corner of the wheel house. There was no mistaking who it was, and he looked twice as big in the dark.

"Mr. Curran?" asked Cliff.

"Aye, aye, sir!" said the newcomer hoarsely.

"Are you on watch?"

"Yes, sir!"

"What do you mean by leaving the bridge? Where's the quartermaster?"

"I sent him for'ard to put out oil," said Mr. Curran sullenly. "I was in the crow's nest, an' when I heard you givin' commands, I thought there was no use in me comin' down again. I was keepin' a lookout fer signs o' the man."

"In the crow's nest?"

"Aye," said Mr. Curran, "on the wheel house roof. Her engines is stopped," he went on, "and her helm is hard aport. Whoever it was went over to starb'd."

The ship had circled around again so that she had ceased to roll, and at this minute Mr. Lundstrom came on the bridge.

"What happened?" asked Cliff.

"Man overboard," said Mr. Lundstrom. He was wet and dripping from his boat journey and he still panted slightly. "I guess he's gone for good. We picked up the light buoy and hung around a while and hailed two or three times, but didn't hear a thing."

"We might as well go then, hadn't we?" asked Cliff. "Do you know who it was?"

"No, sir, shall I muster the crew?"

"Yes, muster the crew. Then put her on her course again. What time is it?"

"It's about one bell," said Mr. Lundstrom. "I was on my way to relieve the bridge when the cry was raised."

"Run down an' change yer clothes," said Mr. Curran. "I'll keep watch till you come back. I run over a half hour, a few minutes won't bother me none."

Mr. Lundstrom went thankfully below and Cliff took a turn up and down the bridge. The bell clanged as Mr. Curran started the engines again.

"For'ard there!" he roared. "That'll do the oil!"

Cliff tried to get some sort of calm out of the wild storm in his head.

"I heard you givin' commands," the fourth mate had said.

So the fourth mate had not given them. Who, then, had given them?

"I don't care," said Cliff, "as long as they think I gave them. Some one saved me from making an awful mess of everything. Golly, I always seem to read in the wrong place."

He went back into the chart room and to bed.

After a time he muttered again to himself:

"No one could call this voyage monotonous, at least."

Before he went to sleep the mate reported that the crew had been mustered and that the evil-faced mess boy was missing.

THAT morning after breakfast Cliff applied himself to Lecky and Bowditch. He worked conscientiously and read thoroughly as he could. He had, at college, taken a course in astronomy, because he needed a certain number of hours to fill out his schedule, and astronomy furnished the necessary points without involving too much labor.

He was more than thankful now that he had taken it instead of something else, because he knew how to read a sextant, even if he didn't know what to do with the reading after he had secured it.

He went frequently to the port hole to be sure that the weather promised a sight of the sun at noon. That night he was going to try working the latitude from a star, but he would practise on the sun first.

So then, at noon he went forth, armed with his sextant, and, waiting until the opportune moment, got his sight and then ran madly into the chart house, counting seconds aloud. This wasn't so hard!

Latitude from his sight and longitude from his chronometer, and there was the ship's position. Simple enough.

As he progressed, however, he discovered that it was not so simple. He referred from one book to the other. He wrote page after page of figures, and then destroyed them. He beat his brow. It was after eight bells in the afternoon watch before he had his work in shape to pull out the chart.

Painstakingly he plotted the ship's position. Wasn't it wonderful, that upon these boundless seas, far from sight of any vessel or land, he could yet find his precise position in all that wet solitude. He stuck a pin into the point he had located and straightened up with a sigh.

Then he gave a startled yell, or more properly, a yelp. According to the chart, the ship was about to run ashore on the coast of Labrador.

The quartermaster put his head through the wheel house door. "Did you call, sir?" he enquired.

"No!" said Cliff. "Well, maybe I did. Let me have a look at the compass."

He went into the wheel house and looked into the binnacle. The ship's head was dead south.

"Ever had any trouble with this compass?" Cliff asked the man at the wheel.

"Well, not as I know of," said the man, "no more'n ordinary. She acts up sometimes a little accordin' to the cargo, but not to speak of."

Cliff could not resist having a look through the port windows. He was quite comforted to see no land.

"It's a little warm for Labrador, too," he decided.

He went back into the chart house and gazed ruefully at the deck littered with torn paper, at the sheets on the desk, covered with figures and at his two advisers, Nathaniel Bowditch and Captain Lecky. He inspected the chart.

"Gee," he thought, "I'll never learn this stuff and in a week or so, if we hold our course and speed, I'll be knocking a corner off South America."

Knock-knock on the door.

"What now?" thought Cliff. "I never have very long to think of one trouble before a new one comes up and drives the other out of my mind."

"Come in!" he cried aloud.

The second mate put in his head.

"There's a destroyer on the starboard quarter," said he, "and I think she's signaling to us."

Cliff went out, as he always did, trying to keep a stiff upper lip, but pretty nervous just the same. If the destroyer stopped them and sent a boat's crew aboard he would be in a bad way. He felt a draft on his feet, so to speak.

From the bridge the destroyer was plainly visible. She was sliding along, rolling and diving like a porpoise, the smoke from her stacks blowing ahead over her lee bow. She hung on the *Saugus'* quarter in order to keep out of the *Saugus'* smoke, and her blinker was going palely.

"Do you know what she wants?" asked Cliff.

The second mate looked at him searchingly.

"No," said he, "don't you?"

"If she wanted to speak to us," said Cliff thoughtfully, "she'd fire a shot across our bow, wouldn't she?"

"She might," agreed Mr. Lundstrom, "but they can probably see you on our bridge, so they're sending Morse."

"So I see," said Cliff. "Can you read Morse?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it's no loss," said Cliff. "I know the commander of that ship and he's asking me if I've got anything to drink aboard."

The second mate grinned.

"If that's all he wants," said he, "maybe we can help him out."

"Well, as long as we haven't got any signaling device, we can't answer very well, can we?"

The mate shook his head. He and Cliff continued to watch the destroyer. She loafed along, at one moment outlined boldly against the sky, the next hidden behind a sea with nothing but her stacks visible. Cliff tapped idly on the canvas dodger.

"I ought to have been a poker player," he thought. "My talents are wasted going to college. All the same, I wish that snaky looking ship would get out of there."

The destroyer irritated every one on board. The word of her presence went about rapidly and the crew clustered at the starboard bulwarks and on the foc'sle head to watch her. The tension became unbearable, and some of the crew even shook their fists at the distant vessel. Cliff decided that this was a little strong.

"Will you step down, Mr. Lundstrom," said he, "and tell those men that the next one that shakes his fist at that ship I shall put in irons."

"Very good, sir," said the mate, and went to do it.

When he returned, the destroyer winked solemnly twice, like an owl, and putting her helm down, slid out of sight behind the seas.

"I think I'll go down now," said Cliff, and so went back to the chart house.

As he went in, he noted Mr. Lundstrom taking off his cap and wiping his brow. This was rather remarkable, since it was not an overwarm afternoon.

Inside the chart house, Cliff sat on the desk and began to hunt for a little nerve tonic in the shape of a cigaret.

"This mess boy's death must be written up in the log," said he., "that much I have learned, and more of this inventory stuff performed. I'll delegate Mr. Lundstrom to do that. I don't remember very well what that fellow looked like. Let's see what the articles say about him."

CLIFF opened the drawer in which he had kept the ship's papers for future reference, hunted around until he found the articles of agreement, which have at the bottom a description of the seamen signing them.

He found that James Keegan, birthplace Chelsea, Mass., age eighteen, five feet six inches in height, had signed on as mess boy. His hair was given as black and his complexion pimply. Cliff tossed the papers on to the desk and tried to conjure up a mental picture of the mess boy.

A large pin with a red head rattled along the chart and fell to the deck. Cliff picked it up and looked at it in astonishment.

"Now where the deuce did that come from?" he asked himself.

The chart, Lecky, Bowditch, and the other aids to navigation that he had employed to find the ship's position, were still spread on the desk, but it was apparent at Cliff's first glance that they had been moved from where he had left them.

In his despairing glance around before he went on the bridge, he had gained a clear mental picture of that desk, and he noted immediately that things were not as he had left them.

Where had that pin come from? Cliff looked again at the chart. There was a large hole in it where the pin had been and that hole was out in the boundless sea, a little below the fortieth parallel of latitude.

"Watson," said Cliff to the couch, "draw up a chair. What do you make of this?"

"Sherlock, old dear," replied Cliff to his own question, "I would bet a cookie that Captain Nemo is aboard disguised as a stewardess. 'Twas he that gave the orders last night, or rather early this morning. Eh, what?"

He chewed on his hand with a serious face for a while.

"Golly," he decided, "I wish this mysterious benefactor would disclose himself. Maybe not, though. If he came forward in every emergency as he has done in the last one and then retired until he was useful again, all the better. Just like a Slave of the Lamp, only I can't summon him at will. I bet his navigation is right, too. That's about where I figured we'd be."

He felt his cheeks redden a bit at the thought of his own work, when he had placed the vessel off Labrador.

"I'll try a star tonight," thought Cliff, "and see how I make out on that."

"Now about this mess boy. I wonder how he fell overboard. I must have an investigation of that. Give us a piece of paper, there's a lot of things I've got to do today.

"First off, inspect the log. Whether it's being kept properly or not I don't know and maybe Curran can't write. We ought to have a fire drill. Put that down.

"Now, after last night I'm going to have a look at the boats and be sure they're all in good shape and have everything in them that the book says they should have, and see that one of them is ready to swing out in case of emergency. They got that one out in good style last night, and in the dark, too."

A SHIP has two logs in these modern times. The logbook, in which is entered the day's run, weather conditions, et cetera, and the official log kept by the captain, containing convictions of members of the crew, deaths, serious illnesses, the amount of money due any member of the crew who dies on the voyage, the names of any men who jump ship in a foreign port, or who leave for any other reason before the expiration of the voyage, the names of any persons married by the captain, and the names of any new passengers acquired by reason of a stork having alighted on the foc'sle head.

Cliff had written up an account of the deaths of the captain and first mate, but had not yet put it in the log. He wanted to consult Mr. Lundstrom about it first. As for the navigator's log, he had never set eye on it. Now that he knew—or thought he knew—the ship's position, he could figure the run and see that it was entered in the log. He had also discovered a table explaining the abbreviations for weather conditions: D for drizzling rain, R for continuous rain, BCM for blue sky but hazy horizon and so forth.

The state of the sea was denoted by numerals, from zero for calm to nine for tremendous, a state of sea that would not be met with except during a tropical cyclone or a submarine earthquake.

A man once wrote down a sea as ten, but he had been navigating Green River in a schooner a short time previous.

The rest of the day Cliff spent in investigating the mess boy's death, with the result that he knew slightly more about it than before. The second mate had been going on watch and had seen something dark flash by from the boat deck. He had raised the alarm and had taken the liberty of ordering away a boat. It was the opinion of all that the boy had been corking off, that is, stealing a little sleep on a boat cover, and had rolled overboard.

Why should a man sleep on a boat cover when he had a dry bunk? Why do sailors and soldiers and men in all walks of life do foolish things that bring them to their deaths? Perhaps in obedience to a natural law. If every one that was born lived, the human race would soon starve to death.

Before supper, in order to blow away the fogs that had gathered on his brain during the afternoon's session and to perk up his appetite a bit, Cliff climbed to the bridge. There was a ship in sight on the port beam, but she was heading north and Cliff paid her little heed.

The second mate, who, since he was acting as first officer, had the four to eight watch, had been observing the other vessel with a glass. His hand shook slightly as he tucked the glass under his arm when Cliff appeared.

"What's she look like?" asked Cliff cheerfully.

"What's what look like?" asked Mr. Lundstrom.

"Why, that ship!" cried Cliff, pointing her out.

"Is there a ship in sight?" asked Mr. Lundstrom in astonishment.

Then realizing that the other vessel could be clearly seen from the bridge, he got very red.

"I've been watching her so long that I forgot you could see her with the naked eye, now," said the mate. "I was trying to read her name."

"May I have that glass?" said Cliff.

The mate's eyes shot back and forth like a cornered animal's. Then he gave the glass to Cliff, after which he took out a gummy handkerchief and wiped his face with it.

Cliff focused the glass. He could see the other ship very easily. She was a cargo boat, though larger than the *West Saugus*, and the words *Cedric*, *Rotterdam* appeared in huge letters upon her side. Nothing unusual, certainly.

"What's she got her name painted so large for?" asked Cliff.

"So any warship will know she's a neutral," said Mr. Lundstrom. "I say any warship, but it's mostly the undersea boat that they fear."

It occurred then to Cliff like a flash that the reason the second mate was so nervous and acted so strangely at times was because he feared the submarine.

"I forget, sometimes," thought Cliff, "that we're at war and that any German that wants to can grab us off. I don't think there are many wandering around loose, though."

CLIFF handed the glass back to Mr. Lundstrom and took a turn up and down the bridge. Mr. Lundstrom fidgeted a bit and gave every evidence of yearning to take another look at the Dutch vessel, but he refrained for some mysterious reason, and contented himself with taking her bearings with the pelorus.

This had the effect of drawing Cliff's attention, for he was curious to see what Mr. Lundstrom was squinting at. When he approached, Mr. Lundstrom stepped aside and Cliff perceived that he had been looking through a kind of compass arrangement, with a tall eyepiece on either side.

Cliff puzzled a moment, and then guessed that this thing was for taking the bearings of lighthouses, buoys and passing vessels. He squinted at the Cedric, lining the sights on her stack. Then he looked at the dial, but it meant nothing to him. After a few more turns, Cliff went below to the saloon.

"If I could see through this deck," thought Cliff, "I bet I could see that mate watching that ship with his glass. Maybe he's afraid she'll turn around and run into us."

Cliff was surprized not to meet the chief engineer. He and Cliff and Curran usually had supper together, as the second mate had the bridge, and the third mate did not eat until later, when he ate his supper with Mr. Lundstrom and the junior engineer. The chief, however, did not show up until just as Cliff was leaving. He seemed surprized to see that Cliff had eaten.

"Well," said Cliff, "I'm sorry we didn't have you to talk to tonight."

"I thought I'd better stay down. That boy, you know, he's a little young. When we get a 'stand by' bell in midsea, I want to be around, you know. But I guess it don't amount to a great deal."

"Stand by bell!" repeated Cliff. "I didn't give any bell. Who's working that telegraph without calling me?"

The chief said nothing, but looked rather uncomfortable and went in to supper. Curran, who had been getting up from the table and selecting a toothpick, heard the last part of the conversation and stepped out on deck very hurriedly, to look over the port rail. He was afflicted with a slight cough. Cliff followed the other man's gaze.

The *Cedric,* which had been heading north, had now turned and pointed her bow directly for the *West Saugus.*

"What's that mean, Mr. Curran?" asked Cliff.

It occurred to him that the *Cedric* was more plainly seen from the deck than she had been on the bridge, which would indicate that she was coming nearer. Moreover, it was almost dark and the other ship's lights winked on as they watched her.

"What's she doing that for?" asked Cliff again, but before the mate could answer a blue flare shot up from the forward part of the vessel.

At that Curran swore and without a word to Cliff, turned and leaped up the ladder. A greenish light flooded the deck. Cliff's startled eye beheld a green flare going on his own forecastle and after that, having no thought but that he would assault and batter the first man he met, Cliff followed Curran up the ladder and so to the bridge.

The second mate was there and a quartermaster with a bundle of Costons under his arm. There was a third man also, one of the seamen whom Cliff did not know.

"What the —— are you doing on this bridge?" Cliff cried to the seaman. "Get below!"

The man looked at the second mate, but seeing no encouragement there, turned to go down. Cliff booted him handsomely and after that he moved faster.

"Now what does all this monkey business mean?" roared Cliff, addressing the second mate. "Who gave orders to run this ship at reduced speed? What do you mean by burning flares without my authority? What's that ship want?

"By the red-hot hinges of scarlet ——! I'm in command here and I don't want you to forget it for a moment. Why wasn't I called? Answer me! I'll open your seams for this, my man! You presume too much!"

Mr. Lundstrom made no reply, but merely looked at Cliff with a slack jaw-tackle. In the well deck the crew lined the bulwarks. There were two on the forecastle head, black against the greenness of the flare.

They seemed to know what they were about and showed none of the excited curiosity of the men on the well deck. Cliff looked at the telegraph. The indicator was at "slow."

He jumped into the wheel house and looked into the binnacle. The *Saugus* was a good twenty degrees off her course.

"Who gave the order to change the course?" he asked the man at the wheel.

"Mr. Lundstrom, sir."

"Put her back on her course," said Cliff and then returned to the bridge.

"Mr. Lundstrom," said he, "go below. I'll look into this later. I am very much disturbed by your actions. Stay in your room until I see you again."

Mr. Lundstrom went down. Cliff stepped into the chartroom and got his night glasses and then he leveled them at the dark blob of the *Cedric.* The other ship had turned her head around and was heading northward again.

"Golly," thought Cliff as he began to pace the bridge again. "I hope I haven't done something wrong. Those flares might be some legitimate signal and Mr. Lundstrom may have been perfectly justified in what he did. I shouldn't have gone off the handle like that.

"I bet he thinks I'm a young fool. Still, I'm the boss of this ship and he's got no right to change course or speed without calling me. Just the same, I can't relieve him from duty. He's too valuable. The third mate I don't know at all, and Curran isn't any better than a lookout. I'll spend the rest of Lundstrom's watch trying to dope out what to do to him."

AT eight o'clock Mr. Curran came up and Cliff remarked on the state of the weather, the course and speed and the fact that the *Cedric* was now hull down beyond the horizon.

He very nearly consulted with Mr. Curran, but decided it was beneath his dignity. Then he thought of taking the fourth mate to task for his abrupt departure when the *Cedric* showed the flare, but he desisted from that too.

"I've done enough roaring tonight," he thought. "I'd better take a lower tone. After this 'I'll roar, an it were a sucking dove.' "

While Cliff slept, Mr. Curran mounted to the roof of the chart house, where there was a small crow's nest. The *Saugus* carried her lookout there instead of on the mast. Mr. Curran looked anxiously about the horizon and noted a black wall to windward.

"Fog," he remarked.

"—— the luck!"

He inspected the horizon for signs of vessels, but saw none.

"If she's there," he muttered, lowering his glasses, "she's running without lights."

"She ain't there, sir," spoke up the lookout, "she's been hull down an hour ago, headin' to the nor'ard."

Mr. Curran gave a slight start, but made no reply. He had forgotten the presence of the lookout. He rubbed his chin meditatively and then returned to the bridge. He stumped up and down for some time, watching the fog bank roll nearer and nearer.

A faint clanging began to beat upon his ear. He thought at first it was the clock in the wheel house striking, but he dismissed that thought immediately. In the first place it was not time for it to strike and in the second place when the clock struck, it rang *ding-ding, ding-ding, ding*, striking the bells two together, while this other ringing was slow and regular.

Mr. Curran turned his glasses on the forecastle head. The ship's bell was gone from its accustomed place and two men leaned over the rail, apparently fishing. A faint clang wafted to Mr. Curran's ears. The strokes were slow—*one, two, three*, pause, *one, two, three*, pause, *one, one*.

"Huh!" snorted Mr. Curran, "so you bring him back that way! King's up, eh? I've got an ace in the hole, though, my laddy bucks."

The fourth mate then stepped nimbly into the wheel house and opening a locker picked up a Coston light. This he tapped meditatively on his hand for a moment or two, then he returned it.

"—— if I pull trawl now," said he aloud. "I can get a bigger catch by waiting."

He opened the door and when he noted the swift approach of the fog, cursed feelingly. Then he spoke to the seaman who was standing by.

"Nip below," he said, "and fetch me a pot of java. I'm gettin' gravy eyed."

When the seaman had gone, Mr. Curran turned to the quartermaster.

"Have we got any red lights?" he asked.

"The bosun has got some, sir."

"Go get me a can. I'll take your trick. Don't let the Old Man see you."

The quartermaster hesitated a minute, but an order is an order, and Mr. Curran was in charge of the ship. The quartermaster withdrew. The door had not banged behind him before the fourth mate was on his knees by the binnacle.

A key rapidly fitted into the door in the binnacle base, the door opened, and a flashlight illumined the interior. There were two racks inside, with wires lying on them, their ends painted red and blue. Mr. Curran did something with these wires.

Then he peered into the compass. A wrench clicked on iron as he loosened the nuts on the iron spheres beside the compass and moved them in and out, until he was satisfied. All the time he kept swinging the wheel, so that the ship's head yawed from starboard to port.

Finally he gave a quick turn to the wheel, shut the binnacle door, and then straightened the ship on her course again. When the seaman returned with the coffee, the fourth mate drank it with evident satisfaction.

THE quartermaster was a long time in coming back with the light, for he had had to arouse the bosun and this had taken some time. Mr. Curran chided him for his slowness. Then he stepped to the bridge, noted the position of a star and, returning to the wheel house, peeked into the binnacle again.

The man at the wheel thought he saw the fourth mate grin, but Curran covered his own face with the coffee mug so quickly that the helmsman might have been mistaken.

The grunting of the fog horn awakened Cliff so that he was already up when the messenger from the bridge knocked and reported that the weather was getting thick. Cliff put on an oilskin that had once belonged to the captain and went out.

Thick was a good word. The fog was dense enough to bite.

From the bridge it seemed as if a heavy blanket had been stretched about the ship, shutting off all sound and vision. The water hung in drops on the canvas dodger and streamers of fog swept over the rail like boarding seas. The deck light under the foc'sle head was a mere glow, a yellow blob in the darkness. Cliff swallowed hard several times.

The book hadn't mentioned what to do in a fog, except to sound the horn at two minute intervals. Some one was doing that, for a guttural shriek roared from behind him and destroyed what calmness of mind he had had when he came up.

"Stand by!" yelled Cliff.

The fourth mate shoved the telegraph over.

"Sure," thought Cliff.

"Reduced speed! Dead slow!" he commanded and his heart rose with the jangle of the telegraph.

"There's nothing to do now but stay up," he assured himself. "We won't hit anything in mid-ocean."

The thought struck him that there were other ships prowling around these seas—schooners, tramps, destroyers, big forty-thousand-ton liners. Now, if he slid into one of them?

"I can swim, thank heaven," he decided, "and maybe Captain Nemo or whatever my mysterious benefactor's name is will take charge. I'd just as soon he was on the bridge with me now. I'd feel a little easier in my mind."

During the rest of the night Cliff had leisure to think back on what he had read in the "Seaman's Guide" about precautions to be taken while sailing in fog. The first thought he had was to close the watertight doors.

He decided that on a ship the size of the *West Saugus* such doors would be closed by hand and he sent a messenger to rouse the carpenter and have it done. Cliff wasn't sure whether the carpenter was the proper one to do this, but he decided he would chance it, and if anything was said, he could reply that that was the way it was done in the Navy and as long as he was running the *West Saugus*, Navy fashion would prevail.

Things weren't so bad now. The air was warm and the chief discomfort was in staying awake. Cliff had some black coffee brought up and that helped considerably.

At eight bells he had a second issue of coffee and sipped it while Mr. Lundstrom came up and took over the watch. Cliff listened to the third mate turning over, which he did in a sloppy enough manner, merely mentioning that it was thicker than burgoo and that the old girl had barely steerage way. He said nothing of the course, but went hastily down the ladder.

"I'll change that," said Cliff, "before we get to South America. I'll have the watch changing here and the men saluting the bridge and each other, all done as it should be."

It might be remarked that the "Seaman's Guide" was written for officers of passenger-carrying vessels, big freighters, and similar boats, and the methods outlined therein for changing watch, holding boat and fire drills and other ship's business were hardly applicable to a tramp like the *West Saugus*.

The author, however, had made no distinction and Cliff certainly didn't intend to. He noticed in a disinterested way that Mr. Lundstrom did not speak to him. He also remembered that he had told Mr. Lundstrom to stay in his room.

"Well, let it go now," he thought, "I don't care to stay on this bridge alone in the fog. I'll give him proper —— when the weather clears."

After a time, and with no warning of any kind, the fog suddenly became gray and before Cliff realized it, the day had come. The deck light under the forecastle went out, the quartermaster who had been spelling the mate on working the horn went to turn out the side lights.

The foc'sle head, the bow and the jack staff became visible. It seemed as if vision ended just beyond the angle of the bow. It was then that Cliff began to feel nervous. He fidgeted up and down, he kept looking over his shoulder, he jumped at the sound of the mate's oilskin rasping on the dodger, he could have wept in sheer horror of that gray wall ahead, and the soupy water sliding away under it, as if it were flowing under a door.

"Up too late," Cliff muttered. "I ought to be in bed."

He knew, though, that however he might keep off the bridge and out of sight and trouble in fine weather, he must stay up now. In time of emergency the book said that the master should be on the bridge and there was no doubt but that this was such a time.

"I shouldn't be afraid now," Cliff told himself. "Daytime is no time to be afraid."

As the light increased, however, his fear grew, until he was on the very edge of panic. At this moment a man loomed up at the head of the ladder. Cliff waited for him to speak, but he stepped onto the bridge and said nothing. Cliff looked at the second mate, who in turn was looking at Cliff, his teeth bared in a snarl.

"Golly!" thought Cliff, "that's the man I kicked off the bridge last night. What's he up again for? Golly! I wonder if he's

Captain Nemo? I don't care if he is, he's got no business on this bridge.

"Here you!" he went on aloud, "what do you want? Didn't I order you off this bridge last night?"

The big seaman laughed heartily, but made no answer.

"Go below!" yelled Cliff. "By ——, I'll have you in irons the rest of your life!"

He made a step forward, his fist clenched.

"Stop!" a voice cried in his ear.

Cliff almost collided with the second mate. Mr. Lundstrom was standing directly in front of him, his face white and drawn and his lips quivering with anger. He held a pistol, a most enormous weapon, Cliff thought, just about an inch from Cliff's breastbone.

"You pup!" said the second mate huskily. "You swab; you bilge drinker! —— you!"

His voice failed him momentarily and then he proceeded to swear in his own tongue.

FROM forward came the crash of a shot. Somewhere in the bowels of the ship there was a chorus of shouts, faint and almost inaudible, but loud enough for Cliff to hear the metal note in the voices that spoke of blood lust.

Did he dream? Had he fallen asleep? No chance. Feet thumped on the deck behind him. Cliff turned about, forgetting the mate and his gun. A man had leaped on to the bridge from the chart house roof, and when he straightened up, Cliff saw that it was Curran.

Curran made one little jump across the bridge and his fist bumped into the big seaman's body. The seaman grunted heavily. He returned a sweeping swing that knocked Curran half way to the starboard wing.

Then they went at it, twisting and turning, exchanging blows that would put a bull down for the count; clinching, kicking, gouging, pulling hair, using every means of offense but their teeth.

The second mate dared not leave Cliff and seemed to keep from using his pistol for fear of hurting the big seaman.

Curran had a black eye and his lip was split, but his antagonist was panting heavily and obviously weakening, although he showed no blood. In the flash of a second, Curran ducked a swing and seized the other's wrist as it went by, at the same time swinging around with a grunt or a gasp.

The big seaman went up on Curran's shoulder, lay across his back, and while Cliff and Lundstrom cried out together, Curran swung his man to the dodger and over the rail.

Silence.

The mate's gun roared and Curran dropped.

"Now!" began the second mate, turning to Cliff, when a cry from forward startled him.

The cry was echoed faintly by many more.

"*Lululul!*" came from the fog.

The mate and Cliff looked forward. Like a picture on the screen of the fog loomed a ship, dead ahead, and broadside on to the *West Saugus*. So near she was that Cliff saw the men on her bulwarks, the black mouth of a ventilator, staring portholes.

Cruuunch!

The *Saugus'* bow sank into the other ship's flank. To Cliff's horror, the bow continued to cut and grind its way into the other ship. A ladder shook, bent, collapsed utterly and was swept from sight. A deck stanchion cracked and gave way slowly, a boat davit leaned like an overweighted limb and carried away. Its boat, swung in the falls and then fell on the *Saugus'* forecastle in a shower of splinters.

Would that bow never stop? There was a door before it now and it seemed as if it would poke the jack staff right through the doorway, but at last the bow stopped and went no further.

Cliff recovered his wits first and his fist caught the mate squarely on the nose. The swing was a little wild, but the next one was better and landed on the chin, so that Mr. Lundstrom stumbled backward, dropped his gun, grabbed wildly for a handhold, lost his footing and went head over heels down the ladder, where he lay in a heap, the tails of his oilskins over his head.

Cliff took one horrified look at him and then turned to see what was happening forward.

The bow of the *Saugus* was still deep in the other ship's side. Perhaps the effect was heightened by the fact that the apex of the bow had been crushed in, and having been folded back into the *Saugus* like the bellows of an accordion, appeared to be buried from sight in the vitals of the other ship.

The engines of the *West Saugus* were still going ahead and this kept the bow tightly against the other ship, and plugged the hole so that the sea could not rush in and sink her immediately.

Men ran about on the other's deck, there was a great deal of singing out, steel crunching, débris banging on the decks, and then after a man on the *Saugus'* forecastle had called something to the other ship, the cries took on a higher note, a note of wilder excitement even than they had yet held.

Two or three jumped down from the strange vessel on to the *Saugus'* deck, a man seized the end of a broken stay or a cargo lift and taking a short run, swung himself across the shattered bow, to the well deck of the *Saugus.*

WHILE a man's heart might beat thrice, the bulwarks of the stranger became lined with men, but they were hindered from coming on to the *Saugus* by the fact that she lay bow on and it took a good eye and a clear head to clear the wreckage and land on the deck instead of in the sea.

"If they go slow," thought Cliff, "they can all come aboard that way."

Cliff had a hazy fear that both ships might sink any minute, but he was too stunned by the suddenness of the accident really to understand what had happened.

Clang-clang-clang! Cliff leaped about. Curran had dragged himself to the telegraph and, pulling himself up by the standard, had shoved the handle over to Full Astern.

The *West Saugus* wrenched herself from the other ship, as a sword is torn from a wound, and backed clear, her bow swinging to starboard.

"What are you trying to do?" cried Cliff. "Do you want to sink us both?"

The fourth mate made no reply, but slumped down in a heap again. Cliff leaped to the telegraph, but he remembered that if he started the engines ahead, he might crash again into the other ship. He looked forward despairingly. He beheld the strange ship at an angle now, like a painted picture against the fog.

Her black side showed clearly a narrow gash like the mark of an ax on a tree, showing from superstructure to waterline. From where her quarter blended into the fog, to just beyond the mark of the collision, leaped out the white letters of her name—*Cedric, Rotterdam.*

Then the gray curtain shut down and she was gone, the voices of her crew crying and a sound as of water rushing through a sewer, growing fainter and fainter in the fog.

Then Cliff shoved the telegraph to Stop, but the *Saugus'* sternboard still carried her away from the other ship, and the swing of her bow turned her around, so that when she finally lost way and lay rolling and wallowing in the seas, Cliff could not tell in what direction the other ship lay.

He pulled the brass handle of the fog signal, but there was no answer from the fog. He looked below him, where men fought and rolled about the deck, but their angry shouting and the crash of pistol shots did not register upon his consciousness.

He was dazed, his mind was benumbed by the rapid succession of events, until it refused to thrill to any more impulses, however strong they might be. He pulled the fog horn again.

On the heels of the sound came a terrific explosion that shook the *Saugus* in every plate and rivet. The sky rained bolts, pieces of wood, bits of chain, lengths of wire, that fell, rattling on the *Saugus'* deck or splashing into the sea.

There were a few cries from the fog, a great sucking sound, like a man inhaling soup, then silence. After a time the *West Saugus* lifted and bowed to a higher sea than usual, then she resumed her slow rolling, while the fog swept in billows across her deck.

Cliff looked down into the well deck again. A man herded four others before him into the corner under the break of the forecastle. The four had their hands above their heads.

By the winches knots of men struggled and writhed. Two fought in the port gutter, and even as Cliff's eye alighted on them, one smote the other valiantly, so that he fell to the deck, and after some feeble efforts to rise, stayed where he was.

Two more men swept into the range of Cliff's vision, like leaves borne on the breeze. Strangled cries arose. Cliff leaned over the dodger to see better, but the bridge rail was too high.

With a despairing glance at the fourth mate's body, Cliff ran down the ladder, jumped over Mr. Lundstrom and went forward to the ladder into the well deck. The view from here was much better.

A man with a revolver stood on the hatch, but he could not use his weapon without fear of hitting the wrong man. Free fight was being indulged in on all sides, save in the port corner, where the four held their hands aloft.

The man with the revolver disappeared from view, then reappeared a second later, rolling across the deck toward the gutter, his cap and weapon gone and the rest of him very wet. A knot of fighters separated with strange suddenness and went sliding and slipping to join the man.

"Give 'em ——, boys!" roared a big voice. "We'll pirate 'em."

"That sounds like the engineer," thought Cliff, and descended the ladder a step or two to see better.

Sure enough, the chief engineer and a goodly number of the black gang stood in the starboard alley door, holding the fire hose in their hands and directing the streams about the deck.

The fighters were separated, blown across the deck, piled one upon the other, rolled over and over in helpless confusion. A man on the forecastle head began to cry out wildly, and wave his arms over the side. The black gang advanced across the deck, dragging their hose after them.

"Git that guy up there," roared the chief, pointing to the forecastle head, "he's one of 'em!"

The hose stream swept over the forecastle, but the man there ran behind the capstan. *Bang!* The hose nozzle gave a wild jerk, then sank limply. The stream died to a sad dribble and the round, snakelike body of the hose flattened out on the deck.

There was shouting from the starboard alleyway, and consternation was apparent among the black gang.

They fled back under the superstructure and the pile of men in the port gutter began to untangle itself. The man who had hidden behind the capstan rushed out again, hurled himself down the ladder and jumped upon a bollard, from where he called over the side to some one below him.

Cliff in turn ran to the port rail and looked over.

"Golly!" he exclaimed.

BELOW him, rising and falling on the seas, held off from the ship's side by oars at bow and stern, was a life boat, already half empty of men. A ladder made of rungs bolted to the vessel's plates went down to that water just forward of the superstructure, and this ladder was black with men crawling up it.

They began to leap down into the well deck and produce rifles and pistols. In a few seconds' time the well deck was once more filled, but now a line of armed men shoved the broken groups of unarmed seamen in front of them, forward into the forecastle.

Some of the newcomers dived through the doors under the superstructure to take possession of the fireroom and engines, and some more came jumping up the ladder at Cliff.

They looked very rough and unmannerly, and one of them had a pistol in each hand, so Cliff put up his hands without being asked. They hustled him ahead of them to the bridge, exclaiming among themselves as they passed Lundstrom's body.

A man went into the wheel-house and took over the wheel and another shoved Cliff ahead of him into the chartroom. Seeing no one there, he turned to Cliff.

"Where's your room?" he asked.

"In there," said Cliff, pointing to the charthouse.

The man shook his head with a snarl, but some one else drew his attention to Cliff's blankets and the many signs of occupancy—cigaret butts, ashes scattered about, open books, a shirt over the back of a chair, pajamas on a hook—that showed the chartroom was used for other purposes than navigating the ship; so after a debate that Cliff could not understand, he was seized by the shoulder and roughly shoved into the charthouse.

The door was banged to, and a man put on guard, for Cliff could hear him walking around the house. Once he looked through the window and, catching Cliff's eye, showed him a pistol.

"In a little while," said Cliff, "I'm going to wake up and find my feet in bed and my head on the floor. Until then, let's be calm. I hope I wake up before they make me walk the plank."

He looked through the porthole and the seaman on guard stared at him insolently.

"He holds me with his glittering eye," thought Cliff.

Then he sat down at the desk and tried to do a few problems in navigation. They did not calm his mind. He began to rehearse events and ask himself questions.

In the first place, was Mr. Lundstrom involved in some plot to seize the ship? If so, that would account for his nervousness and strange actions since the beginning of the voyage. What would he want with her? The seas swarmed with vessels of war and most merchantmen had armed guards, so that he could not be meditating piracy.

Who was the seaman that Mr. Curran had killed? Why had he come on the bridge? Why had Curran fought with him? What was Curran doing in the crow's nest when he was off watch? Where did the *Cedric* come from? Who were these men that had taken possession of the ship?

"And for a final poser," said Cliff aloud, "what came first, the hen or the egg? There's no explanation. I bet my father never sends another cargo on this ship."

After a long time and much whistling, Cliff heard the engines started.

"I suppose they were hunting for more survivors," he thought.

Some time after, a merry controversy started in the wheelhouse. He could not distinguish words, but from the sound of the voices a course of action was being urged by one party that was vigorously contested by another.

Abruptly the door in the bulkhead banged open and three men entered led by Mr. Lundstrom, very red of eye and white of face, with a bloody bandage bound around his head. Mr. Lundstrom moved slowly and painfully.

He advanced upon Cliff and without warning, jerked a pistol from his pocket and pointed it at him. He advanced his snarling face to within an inch of Cliff's.

"You cheap ——!" he snarled, and slapped Cliff's face.

Then he proceeded to kick him savagely.

"Knock me down the ladder, huh? Dirty my ticket for me, huh? You couldn't be mess boy on a good tug boat!"

He said more words so that Cliff several times debated the wisdom of taking one swing at him, but that gun was too near and the other two men had him covered also, so he restrained himself. Finally it became unbearable.

"I don't care what you say," cried Cliff, "but for —— sake, don't breathe on me any more. You'd drive a dog out of a tan yard!"

The second mate snarled and, raising his gun, was about to smite Cliff with it, but one of the others stepped quickly in and caught his hand.

"Enough," said he, "this is play. To work!"

The second mate glowered a bit, then motioned to Cliff to go into the wheelhouse. They left the door open and Cliff could hear them in the chart house rustling the charts, and muttering. At last they called him back and the shorter of the three, who seemed to be the leader, addressed Cliff.

"For the present," said this man, "you will continue as navigator, and as long as you obey the orders I give. You will not give any yourself, but one of us will be near at all times and any orders affecting the ship will be given through him. You will report the ship's position every four hours. See here!"

The man handed Cliff a creased and dirty piece of paper, on which was a latitude and longitude.

"You will lay the ship's head for that place," said the man.

* * *

CLIFF plotted the fix on the chart. It was off the Spanish coast about six hundred miles at sea. Cliff sent to find the day's run from the patent log and finding the pin hole in the chart, roughly computed the ship's position at that moment.

Figuring the run as one hundred and seventy miles, and the course as south, he made another pin hole to show the present position of the ship. The three men looked on while Cliff found the direction of his new destination and, transferring it to the compass rose, found the new course.

As to wind direction and force, currents, compass deviation, and several other things that enter into the finding of a ship's position by dead reckoning, and the laying of a new course, Cliff regarded them not. He knew vaguely of such things, he had encountered them mistily in his reading, but he was mainly interested in satisfying the three men and not in getting the *West Saugus* anywhere in particular. Finally he looked up.

"What is the new course?" asked the short man.

"North thirty," answered Cliff.

The men seemed but half convinced. Nevertheless, after a good deal of looking at the chart, and comparing the course with the compass rose, they seemed satisfied and one of them, stepping to the door, gave the new course to the man at the wheel. Cliff felt the vessel heel as the helm was put hard over and then slowly come to an even keel. The *West Saugus* was headed for Spain.

"Did you look around for any more boats from the *Cedric?*" asked Cliff.

"You mind your own business!" snapped Mr. Lundstrom. "We'll look out for the *Cedric.*"

Then he and his companions went out.

They proceeded slowly through the fog. There was no sound of the horn now, and Cliff wondered if there was any one keeping watch. He opened the door into the wheelhouse. There were three men in there, who were strangers to him, but as they did nothing but scowl, Cliff kept the door open.

He looked out to the bridge and could distinguish three men on watch there, and one who sheltered himself in the wings with a rifle. Men were forward, clearing the wreckage from the foc'sle head, but Cliff could not see into the well deck.

He looked over toward the telegraph and was glad to see that Mr. Curran had been taken care of, though the dark stain where he had bled had not yet been cleaned up.

"I suspect these men to be Germans," thought Cliff, "though what they expect to do with this ship, or where they came from, or who started the fight when we hit the *Cedric,* I can't imagine. If they expect me to navigate them very far, they lean on a broken reed, now I'll inform the world. I'm glad my father doesn't know about this. He'd have apoplexy. As for Helpful Harry Colt, he'd lose his job."

At dinner time Cliff was summoned to the saloon and allowed to eat. One of the three men who had interviewed him that morning and the chief engineer were present. There were two scowling guards, also. The *Saugus'* engineer did not converse beyond: "Pass the ketchup," "A little punk, please" or "Guess this tea was made out of the water he boiled the dishcloths in."

After the meal Cliff was conducted back to the charthouse and shortly afterward Lundstrom appeared, accompanied by a seaman with a rifle. Lundstrom's manner was more than mild.

"I hope you won't think hardly of me for what I said a little while ago," he began, "but I had to keep up appearances with those other men. Things might go badly with me if I appeared to be too friendly."

"Who are they?" asked Cliff eagerly.

"They're from the *Cedric.* One is a sort of bosun and the other two are gunners."

Mr. Lundstrom seemed uncomfortable after he had said this, for fear he had been unwise in his utterances.

"Well," he continued, "what I wanted to see you about is that Mr. Curran is quite sick; that is, he is not so sick as he is restless. He asked to have some one read to him. There isn't any one that can be spared except yourself."

"What if I'm supposed to be on the bridge? I ought to be in charge as long as this fog keeps up. Why isn't the fog signal being sounded?"

"Oh, that will be very well," said Mr. Lundstrom, nervously. "We can call you if necessary. You aren't in command any more, you know, you're just navigator."

This last he said with so much suppressed malice that Cliff could restrain his anger no longer.

"I suppose you are in command now, Mr. Lundstrom," he said coldly.

The second mate's face twisted with rage.

"—— you," he cried, "call you me not Lundstrom! I am named Hecker. In the Imperial German Navy I am chief bosun. This ship belongs to the German Navy now and you are one prisoner of war!"

In a flash he had resumed his conciliatory tone and his better English.

"But let's go down and see Mr. Curran. I didn't mean to shoot him. There was a fight on the bridge, you know, and I was excited. But I will see that he has the best of care. You can always be sure of the best of treatment from me, can't you?"

The mate stared into Cliff's face, almost pleadingly. Cliff made no answer, but in his thoughts he wondered what the chances were of punching Lundstrom's—or Hecker's—Imperial German nose and fouling hawse with the seaman over the rifle. However, he desisted.

The second mate led the way below to Cliff's old cabin, now occupied by Mr. Curran, and unlocking the door they went in.

CURRAN lay in the bunk, his face flushed with fever and his eyes open and staring.

"Well," he cried, his harsh voice rather weak, "so you've come at last, huh? I suppose you want me to shove off right away and save you the trouble of taking care of me if I have to lay up a month or so. Well, I ain't going to, so what d'you think o' that fer ballast?"

"Here's the skipper," said Mr. Lundstrom, coaxingly. "He's come down to read to you a bit. Have you everything you want? I'm sorry there isn't some better fruit aboard."

There were some small spotted oranges on the desk, hardly good enough to throw at the ship's cat.

"Now I'll leave you alone," continued the second mate, smiling with his lips, "and I'll just have this hand stay with you to run errands."

He spoke in German—Cliff knew it wasn't Swedish now—and the guard sat down and stared at the sick man. Then the second mate went out, and Cliff, sitting on the tiny couch, asked Curran how he felt.

"Pretty well," said the fourth mate, "only my leg here ain't very good. I ain't so bad as I might be, save fer the losin' of blood. The bullet went right through. How would you like to read to me a bit? Maybe I c'ud get to sleep if you did."

Cliff assented and Mr. Curran picked up a book from the blankets and handed it to him. As Cliff took it in his hand, he noticed that Curran did not release it and then, while he still wondered at the fourth mate's holding the book so grimly, his eye fell on the other man's thumb. The nail was decorated with some kind of characters in ink. Cliff looked again. Why, there was writing there!

He looked at Curran wonderingly and found that man's eyes fixed on him with terrible intensity. Cliff turned to the thumb-nail again. On it were written the words, "Signal destroyer," and the letters "A.A.O."

Then Cliff began to read from the book without understanding a single word.

His mind worked rapidly.

"Signal destroyer."

So the night he had caught Curran asleep abaft the after house, he must have been signaling a destroyer. And the time the second mate had summoned Cliff to the bridge, the destroyer was answering Curran's signals. He must have been sending them with the flashlight from some concealed portion of the vessel.

"No vessel," read Cliff, "of one hundred gross tons or upward, except those navigating rivers exclusively and the smaller inland lakes, except as provided in section one of this Act, shall be permitted to depart from any port of the United States unless she has on board a crew, not less than seventy-five percentum of which, in each department thereof, are able to understand any orders given by the officers of such vessel."

At this point he suddenly realized what he was reading. It was a copy of the "Merchant Seaman's Act," and had perhaps belonged to some former occupant of the cabin. It struck a chord in Cliff's intelligence.

The seaman that was guarding them was a stranger and Cliff knew that he had come from the *Cedric*, because he was wearing a round cap with ribbons down the back. Cliff had first noticed these caps when the men were climbing the side from the lifeboat and now he remembered that all the guards had worn them. He began to read again.

"Every person shall be rated as an able seaman and qualified for service as such, on the seas, who is nineteen years of age let's take that man's rifle away from him and cut his throat."

Under his eyebrows Cliff observed the guard. He was looking vacantly at the bulkhead and had not moved a muscle.

"I don't think that man understands English," went on Cliff, reading from the book, "so here goes. Lundstrom says his name is Hecker and that he belongs to the German navy and the gang from the *Cedric* have taken charge. Where is this destroyer of yours and what's all this about? What will I signal her with? Who are you anyway?"

"Keep on reading," said Curran and Cliff was startled at the change in his voice. "After a while I'll begin to mutter and be delirious. Then I'll give you a few instructions."

Cliff read on. By the time he had got to the qualifications for mates, Curran began to toss and turn. Cliff got a towel and wetting it in the wash bucket, applied it to the other man's head. Curran moaned slightly.

For about twenty minutes the wounded man waved his arms, muttered and tossed in the bed, until Cliff really began to fear that he was growing delirious. Then he began to talk, thickly and rapidly as a sick man would, but with no trace of his former harsh voice and ignorant accent.

"Watch Lundstrom," he began. "He is the rat. He's badly frightened. I think they've all begun to lose their nerve. If they didn't fear capture, they'd have cut my throat long ago. They want to sit on both sides of the fence. You can't climb to any height if you keep looking down all the time."

His voice sank to a whisper again, and he said no more for some time, then Cliff could hear again.

"There's a destroyer somewhere around. We had one in our wake, but lost her in the storm and when you changed course it threw her completely off. I picked up another, but this —— fog came on and I suppose she's gone now. You send that signal and any ship of war will board you immediately."

Another period of supposed delirium.

"Where did you get your information?" asked Cliff, wringing out the cloth and putting it on the sick man's head again. "I don't know who you are any more than any of the rest."

Curran clawed at his throat. His coarse shirt fell open and Cliff perceived a cord that had at its end a leather bag, very small. Cliff opened this bag. Within was a heavy gold ring, set with a precious stone, and Cliff, though he had only seen one or two like it in his life, recognized it as one that is worn with authority only by graduates of the United States Military or Naval Academy.

Cliff had a slight shock at that. He wondered if Curran had discovered that he, Cliff, was not what his uniform indicated.

"Lundstrom was the leader," continued Curran. "He's an escaped petty officer from the *Ochenfels*. We've had our eye on this ship for some time. She used to tranship cargoes at sea. Caught her through checking up on the manifests with the consular agents. Thought she was doing it with a submarine. Guess not, after the *Cedric* showed up.

"She's a mother ship for subs. Limeys have been trying to find out for a year how it was done. Tranships supplies and crews at sea; sub itself never comes home. *Cedric* takes a relief crew, meets the sub, takes off old crew, leaves new crew and food and goes home.

"They never could find the ship that was doing it. They didn't look for a neutral cargo boat, a rusty tramp, to be doing it. Limeys haven't that much sense. Neither did we. I smelled a rat when Lundstrom signaled her and she changed course.

"He burned a flare and she went off again. I rattled the compass down, so that we changed courses entirely and ran smack into the *Cedric*. I backed her out before many of 'em got aboard, but I wasn't quick enough."

* * *

CLIFF smoothed Curran's brow and patted his wrist. Then he walked over to the porthole and after he had looked out, glanced idly at the guard. The man was looking sympathetically at Curran. Cliff was nearly wild with excitement and suspense.

He had so many things he wanted to ask about, and it was so terrible to have to have all these pauses and by plays.

"Did Lundstrom kill the captain and mate?" he said as though he were talking to himself, as he looked out the porthole.

He waited full fifteen minutes before Curran answered.

"The captain refused to make any more trips," said he, "after we got into the war. The big German organization planned to seize the ship and use her as they were using the *Cedric*. That's why Lundstrom and his gang, six of them, were aboard.

"The chief mate was in on the plot—he was an American, too—but Alexander didn't know anything about it. The Germans had men watching the ship, but the police got them just after they reported to Lundstrom that you were aboard. He lost his nerve when he saw you and when the police came on the wharf, thought the mate had betrayed him, knocked one of his watchers into the slip, and sat in his room all night in a purple funk.

"I suppose the mate intended to explain, but never got the chance. They sent me aboard after getting the police report. The man they captured gave the thing away.

"A destroyer was to follow us and I was to keep in touch with her. We wanted to bag the whole gang, sub and all. I think now she was going to meet up with the *Cedric*. Lundstrom was some surprized when he saw her, though. I think he poisoned the mate. The captain must have got some of it by mistake, because Lundstrom wouldn't want ship to have no navigator.

"You're commissioned from the merchant service, I suppose. Glad of that. A Navy man would have flown a distress signal immediately, or headed back to port when both officers died, and then we'd have had our work for nothing. Dollars don't count in the Navy. Lundstrom advised sea burial, I know.

"That was to prevent an autopsy. Pantry boy gave the poison or knew of it, and Lundstrom chucked him over side to shut his mouth. Went after him with his own gang to be sure he wasn't picked up. Did you hear him giving orders in German?"

"So it was you that gave those orders from the bridge that night," said Cliff in a pitying tone, as he felt of Curran's wrist and pretended to take his pulse.

Curran said nothing for a long time.

"I put those gun locker keys in your pocket when your blouse was drying," he finally said. "How did the *Saugus* stand the collision? Don't answer right away, or the guard will know we are talking together. He'd have known it before now if he wasn't so thick."

In due time Cliff shook his head sadly.

"I don't know," he said, "they won't let me on deck. We haven't sunk yet. The collision bulkhead will help us, won't it? As long as it doesn't come on to blow, we'll be all right."

Cliff noticed then that Curran was really growing weaker and he had made up his mind to go, even before the second mate opened the door and summoned him forth.

"Long enough for this time," announced Mr. Lundstrom—Hecker, "tomorrow you can come again."

ON the way back to the chart house Cliff tried to see what the collision had done to the *Saugus*. She was down by the head and her bow was rather frazzled, but she was still afloat, and though the boats were swung out, the men were going about their work with seeming indifference to any danger.

In the well deck they were scrubbing down, the crew of the *West Saugus* working side by side with the beribboned capped men from the *Cedric*. There were several men about, with rifles across their arms, two on the hatches, one on each ladder, and two on the bridge, but other than these, there were no arms visible.

Cliff sat down at the desk and burned a cigaret. This was certainly an exciting trip.

"I suppose they're scared to death," he meditated, "all alone on these fog-bound seas in a leaky ship. They better be good to Curran, because if they're captured they'll have to answer for their conduct.

"I suppose the officers of the *Cedric* didn't get away. They'd be on the bridge and unable to get to the boats. Maybe they got away after all, only we didn't find them. I wonder why Lundstrom started that scrap so soon. Perhaps he got up his nerve to seize the ship after he saw the *Cedric* and decided he'd do it and then get a navigator from the *Cedric*.

"Gee, I bet he was after those rifles when we went over the captain's stuff that day. That's what he was hunting for the key for. I'll bet Curran got them first. I remember now, he helped lay out the captain. He must have got the keys and dumped the rifles overboard, because he wouldn't have time to hide them anywhere, and some one would see him.

"Then Lundstrom sneaks in and goes to all the labor of sawing off the locks and the guns are gone. Perhaps he'd have tried to grab the ship earlier if he could have got the rifles."

"I wonder how bad Curran gummed the compass. I must ask him. Golly! I changed course since and now we may be on our way to the North Pole for all I know. I hope this fog holds. When it lifts, I'll have to do some more navigation and I don't yearn to do it a bit.

"I didn't have much success the last time. Say, I forgot to ask Curran if he was the man that located the ship the first day I tried it myself. I'll bet he was in here and either saw my feeble attempts, or was working out a fix for his own purposes. I must ask him."

As Cliff reached for another cigaret he heard a confusion of shouts and running feet. He stepped to the porthole and looked out.

"Golly!" he cried.

The fog was lifting rapidly and about two points on the starboard bow was a dazzling brightness in the fog. It was the late afternoon sun, and instead of setting over the stern as it should, it was setting on the bow.

Cliff could hear a great deal of door slamming and excited comment in German going on in the wheelhouse. The door in the bulkhead opened and the short man, the leader of the Germans, thrust in his head.

"Will you step this way a moment, please?" he enquired.

Cliff stepped that way.

The helmsman was staring stupidly from sun to binnacle. As Cliff bent over the binnacle, Lundstrom entered, putting on his coat. He had very obviously been called from his watch below, which he had been spending in improving his personal appearance, for there was much soap around his ears and his face was still pink from the razor's kiss.

Cliff examined the compass. The course was north thirty, but judging from the sun, the ship was really heading south about forty west. Hence the consternation of the Germans. Instead of heading merrily for some submarine rendezvous, they were heading toward the American coast.

Cliff could almost watch their spirits wilt. Here they were, not safely out to sea, but heading toward the cordon of war vessels that infested the coast waters, their ship disabled, their compass out a hundred and eighty degrees or so, and the only navigator aboard an American Naval officer.

Regarding this last thought, they would have been highly surprized if they had known in what way it was true. The petty officer appeared just then, his eyes still encrusted with sleep, and when the situation had been explained, he groaned aloud.

"What do you make of this?" the leader asked Cliff.

"I should say that the compass is out," said Cliff.

"Well, yes, it would seem that it was," said the German heavily, "but what put it out? And how can it be put back?"

"I would guess that the collision affected it," said Cliff, "and about its being put back, we'll probably have some officers from a battleship aboard very shortly who can fix it for us."

The Germans looked sadly enough at one another and the leader heaved a long sigh. He looked out of the wheelhouse windows. Suddenly he howled at the same time that the whistle gave a thunderous toot, and the men in the well deck began to shout as if they had lost their reason. Lundstrom jumped to the windows, then jumped back and kicked Cliff resoundingly.

"Yah! you —— Yank!" he cried, "you meddler! Look! Look! Swine that you are, look!"

He shoved Cliff to the window. The men on the forecastle were waving their hats at something. The old crew of the *Saugus* could be distinguished by the fact that they stood about sullenly and did nothing.

Cliff took a long look and then gasped slightly.

FLYING almost in the shadow of the ship, red in the setting sun, was a long low craft, almost level with the waves. In the center of it was a sort of house, with a tiny mast, and stays that went fore and aft. Men in beribboned hats were mounting to its deck.

"Take a good look!" cried Lundstrom. "Take a good look, it's the last one you'll see, you unspeakable offspring of unbelievable depravity."

He kicked Cliff again, whereat Cliff, heedless of the consequences, swung handily at the German's jaw and knocked him sprawling into a corner. Lundstrom jumped up, tugging at a gun he had in the waist belt of his trousers, but the other two seized him, and after some remonstrance in their own tongue, he agreed to be calm and contented himself with rubbing his jaw and looking buckets of blood at Cliff, who blew upon his skinned knuckles and returned the look with interest.

The three Germans went on to the bridge, and Cliff observed them signaling to the other craft. The man at the wheel left his post and came to the window himself. Cliff looked at him in surprize and then remembered that of course the engines would be stopped and there was no use of the man staying at the wheel.

"By golly!" he exclaimed, looking at the strange ship. "That's a German sub! I never thought of them being so big! Why, she's as long as the *Saugus*. They'll get a navigator from her and then my name will be mud, I suppose."

A boat put off from the submarine and after it had crossed the water between the two ships, a man in a brass buttoned uniform mounted the *Saugus'* side and he and the three petty officers conferred, after an exchange of salutes.

They disappeared and very soon Cliff heard feet on the ladder, and the four of them entered the wheelhouse. The brass buttoned man bowed very stiffly to Cliff and waved the two junior petty officers out.

"I must see the ship's papers, Lieutenant," said he to Cliff. "You are of course my prisoner. May I urge haste?"

The officer spoke English with a very

British accent, so that Cliff would have thought him a real Johnny Bull had he met him anywhere else.

Cliff went into the chartroom and pretended to hunt for the papers. The officer stayed in the other room and evidently ordered in his subordinates, for Cliff could hear the four of them engaged in a very heated discussion.

The officer urged one course, and from the sound of his voice, Lundstrom eagerly seconded it. The other two demurred. Finally the officer stood upon his dignity and that ended it.

He strode through the door into the chartroom and Cliff had no recourse but to hand him the papers. He went back into the wheelhouse and Cliff wondered if he would be confined, or allowed the freedom of the vessel. His heart was chilled at the thought that they might take him aboard the submarine and so carry him to Germany.

"Gee," said the young man, "I'd be a prisoner of war before I started to fight."

The men went out and Cliff, after a few minutes, looked into the wheelhouse. It was deserted. He looked out to the bridge. That, too, was without occupants.

"I'll just take a step out there," thought Cliff, "and see what's going on. They won't any more than tell me to go back again."

He went out to the bridge and looked into the well deck. Two men scampered across the deck at that moment and, jumping on the bulwarks, went down the ladder one after the other. Cliff went into the bridge wing and looked at the boat.

It was quite full and among those present were Lundstrom and his two companions. The boat pushed off and began to row toward the submarine. Some of the Germans on the *Saugus'* deck began to call questions after the boat, which only rowed the faster.

They shouted to one another in frenzy, then seemingly with one accord, made a break for the ladders to the boat deck. There was a wild yell and the first German up the ladder went tumbling down again, very limp and wobbly.

"Give 'em ——, boys!" cried the voice of the chief engineer. "No hose this time! Bomb my engines, would you? I'll bomb you! Chop 'em down, boys. Get their rifles!"

Shots began to sound. Cliff looked at the boat again. The men in it were standing up and waving their arms, perhaps to call the attention of the submarine. The submarine? Where was it?

Cliff grabbed the binoculars from the rack and turned them on the boat, then beyond to see if he could find trace of the sub. He just got the glasses on a black shape, like a tide swept rock, a mast, then a swirl of water. The sub was gone, and the little boat was left alone with its waving men. What did this mean? Cliff turned his glasses forward.

A wild yell from the deck echoed the one that Cliff sent rocketing to the heavens.

"Sail ho!" cried Cliff. "Stand by! Yeaaa! Surrender, you frankfurt eaters, here's Uncle Sam!"

The men on the upper deck could see quite as well as Cliff.

Not more than a mile distant a snakelike ship streaked across the seas. She was one of the new flush deck destroyers, painted like an Indian warrior, daubed with blue and black waves and saw teeth. She was making speed.

Off south of her, another ship, a strange type to Cliff, skipped from sea to sea like a flying fish. These two ships had come down, hidden by the hull of the *West Saugus*, and then, when they had crossed her bow, had probably discovered the submarine at the same time she had discovered them. Perhaps a little before, because a sub sits down pretty low in the water and so visibility from her conning tower is a bit limited.

Away the two ships went, red hot with the excitement of the chase, broad in the path of the sunset. The boat had turned and was pulling back to the *Saugus*. Some of the Germans on the *Saugus* began to put up their hands, others still continued to shove up the ladder, but the husky black gang, armed with shovels, spanners, wrenches and slice bars, soon changed their minds regarding that.

Rifles were snatched from those who had surrendered and in a minute or two the engine-room force were in possession. There were two armed Germans still on the foc'sle head and their rifles kept up a steady popping.

After a second glance Cliff saw that they were not shooting at the men on the upper deck, but at the boat. A faint cry told of a shot that had found a target.

"Disarm those men!" shouted Cliff.

"Let that boat come aboard. We want those fellows."

The black gang looked up and saw Cliff on the bridge. With a cheer they dashed across the well deck, but the men on the forecastle made no resistance and passed over their guns and were hustled down the ladder. Then Cliff went down to meet the men from the boat.

AT FIRST, the sailors came over and were disarmed as soon as they struck the deck. They had nothing to say, but looked very nervous. When the officer came up, Cliff stepped forward.

"Of course you are my prisoner," said Cliff, "may I trouble you for the ship's papers? Eh what, old dear?"

The men of the *Saugus* roared and even the Germans grinned, not because they understood, but to be in accord with the stronger party. The officer's dignity was unbroken. He bowed, returned the packet of papers, and coolly folded his arms. The two petty officers and Lundstrom followed over the side.

"Take the prisoners and stow 'em somewhere," ordered Cliff. "Hoist in that boat or tow it astern, I don't care which. Put the officer in Mr. Jacob's room and those other two men somewhere else. Now," continued Cliff, removing his blouse, "Mr. Lundstrom or Hecker or whatever your name is, you have several times called me names that were uncomplimentary. Moreover you kicked me.

"Now I intend to give you a good dose of sand and canvas. Yes, my fine buck, I'm going to polish you off to a high gloss."

This Cliff did, while Germans and Americans looked on. It was difficult to tell which enjoyed it the most. When it was over, Cliff directed the men to turn to, and told some of the Germans to take Mr. Lundstrom below and revive him as best they might.

"Where'd the chief engineer go?" asked Cliff.

No one seemed to know. Before Cliff could make up his mind what to do next, the chief appeared.

"Well, Cap'n," he cried heartily, "this ship's ours again. We had a hard time, yes, indeed."

Cliff laughed very heartily. The chief was wearing one of the Germans' caps that sat on the very apex of his head, and the ribbons, hanging down and tickling his ears, gave a very fine effect.

"You laugh, sir?" inquired the chief.

Then, putting his hand to his head, he learned the reason.

"Ha-ha, yes, I will laugh, too. One of those men, he went into my shaft alley to place a bomb. But I was in there myself. Yes, I was there. I came out, but so that the men with the rifles would have no fear, I wore out that one's hat. I had his bomb under my arm. I broke as good a wrench over his head as you will find on this side of the Atlantic. But the rifle men had gone. So then we followed after."

"Are there any more bombs down there?"

"No, I think not. We threw two overboard, but they had not been set, either one."

"Not set? I saw two men run for the rail when the boat shoved off. Do you suppose they left any?"

"No, I guess not. You see that undersea boat would not have much room. She could not take all these men. So her boat takes the officers and shoves off. Those two know it and do not care to be left. Nor do they care to have their shipmates' lives on their hands.

"So the bombs were put there, but not set. The bomb in the shaft alley would blow her stern out and sink her. No one would ever know that they had not set their other bombs. This, of course, is what I think."

"You mean they would blow up this ship and leave all those men to drown?"

"Yes, what good is she? Any moment she may sink."

"But why not give them a chance for the boats?"

"Because too many boats means ships coming to pick them up and then the destroyers know that a undersea boat is near, and the undersea boat had better watch out."

"Well, I'm ——!" said Cliff. "No wonder they shot at the boat! Well, let's get some weigh on her and see if we can't get somewhere. Can you run the engines?"

"Oh, yes," said the chief, "but not too much speed, sir; if that bulkhead gives way, we all swim. Yes, indeed, it is a long swim home."

"What happened to your hose the first scrap?" asked Cliff.

"Oh," grinned the chief. "That hose

was too old. She burst. Economy, and old hose, and then when you want it, it flies all to pieces. Well, I must go below, if we are going to get weigh on her again. Good night, sir."

"Good night? Gee, it is night, isn't it? Time flies here so fast I lose track of it. Well, good night."

Cliff mounted to the bridge.

"Boy, who said excitement?" he cried. "Hand to the wheel!" he roared over the dodger, "below there! Where are the quartermasters?"

Two quartermasters came leaping up.

"Where's the third mate?" asked Cliff. "I haven't seen him for a long time."

"He was killed, sir," spoke up one of the men, "during the fight. He rushed out of his room after it was over and one of the Germans shot him."

"Where's his body?"

Both men shifted uneasily and looked at each other. Finally one mustered courage.

"They chucked it over side," said he.

One of the men took the wheel and the other stood by on the bridge. Cliff leaned against the rail. He felt tired and disheartened now. Almost frightened. The excitement of battle, the strain, the realization that he must bear up had left him.

Now he was alone on these black waters in a sinking boat, with no one to help him. Curran was wounded, the third mate dead and Lundstrom a traitor and a prisoner. He tried to remember what the third mate was like.

He hadn't known him very well, hadn't had much to do with him. He was one of those negative personalities that do not leave much of an impression on the memory. He could not have been of much account, for Lundstrom had said he had bought his license and had not earned it.

Well, he was dead now, poor lad, and had no use for any license. Cliff thought of having up the German and making him navigate the ship, but he decided not. Cliff would have no way of knowing where the man was taking him. With a shock he remembered that his compass was off. How then would he steer?

Far off in the night, broad on the starboard beam, a great eye winked.

"What's that?" cried Cliff aloud.

He waited what seemed a long time. The eye winked again.

"Is that a light?" cried Cliff.

The quartermaster brought out a glass. Then he counted audibly. When he had reached forty-three the light glittered again.

"That's Hog Island Light," he cried, "flash every forty-five seconds. If we pick up Cape Charles within a half hour or so we've made a landfall."

In twenty minutes they picked up another light a point on the starboard bow. The second light glittered like a jewel every sixty seconds.

"Yessir," said the quartermaster, "that's Cape Charles. Tomorrow night I sleep at home. Norfolk's our home port, you know, sir."

"Is it?" said Cliff, uninterestedly.

Then he went into the chart house and getting down the "Atlantic Coast Pilot" and the "Seaman's Guide," he plunged into their pages. The light list removed any doubt about the location of the ship. She was approaching the entrance to the Chesapeake.

"THE only thing to do," decided Cliff, "is to take her in. She's got a hole in the bow and no officers, and anyway, I've got a distaste for further voyaging. Now how the deuce did I get here? Let's see.

"First left Boston headed east a little south. A head wind. Then the wind and sea shifted and we changed course to south. I suppose the set of the sea and the wind carried us in toward the land all the time.

"Then Curran gummed our compass to take us back to where his destroyer was, I suppose. What good would that do, though. We would have detected the error the minute the fog lifted. Well, of course, all that would give him time and meanwhile his destroyer might pick us up again. Five days at sea, and then we land here.

"Now if we were heading south according to the compass, and we shifted course one hundred and twenty degrees to the north, we would really be heading southwest when we got done. Well, here we are, anyway, and I'll have the fun of taking her in.

"Perhaps those destroyers will come after us and they might put a man aboard to take us in. Oh, golly, no! That would give me away for sure. They'd know I wasn't an officer, and I'd probably be arrested and have all kinds of trouble. I'm sick of being hailed into court for one thing or another."

He called the quartermaster.

"Have the lights doused," Cliff ordered.

"Not a light on this ship. I don't want to be torpedoed. Stand by the log and let me know as soon as we pick up speed. The sailing directions say that there is a strong tide here that can be felt some distance at sea, and I want to know the minute we get in it."

"Yes, sir," said the quartermaster.

In a little while the lights went out and Cliff, going on the bridge, saw that the side lights were also doused. He looked astern, but there was no sign of the destroyer.

Cliff had in his hand a piece of paper on which he had copied his commands. Cliff had hunted high and low until he had found the chart of the Chesapeake entrance and this he brought out on the bridge and stuck on the table in the wings, securing it by small slats that were evidently for that purpose.

Cape Charles light is visible about twenty miles out, the next light, as near as Cliff could make out, would be Cape Henry, a red-group flash every twenty seconds.

He picked up Cape Charles lightship first and then a white light that glittered three times every twenty seconds. He applied himself to the chart and light list and decided that this was Cape Henry, and that when the light should change to red, he had better change his course.

In the "Seaman's Guide" it said that he must know the compass deviation before trying to go in. With a compass off as much as his, Cliff decided that it was useless to try to do anything with it at all.

"I'll have the lead heaved," he assured himself, "and watch my depth and the character of the bottom, and when I get in the entrance, all I'll have to do will be to keep the red buoys on the starboard and the black buoys on the port side, and I'll be all set."

Though the fog had gone, there was still a haze and this affected the visibility of the lights somewhat. Cliff roared aft for the quartermaster who had been standing by the log and, when he appeared on the bridge, asked him if she showed any sign of speeding up.

"No, sir," said the quartermaster.

There was something in the youth's manner that Cliff did not like. He thought that he had made a mistake, perhaps, in sending a man who was on watch to observe the log. If he had, it was too late now to rectify it.

"Have a couple of men lay forward with the lead," directed Cliff. "Have you seen Mr. Curran lately?"

"I heard at supper that he was comfortable, sir."

"Supper! I forgot all about it. Have them send me up some sandwiches and coffee."

The quartermaster went away and soon after a hail from the forecastle apprised Cliff that the men were in the chains with the lead.

"Mark under water fifty!"

Cliff jumped to the chart. The lightship was broad on the starboard bow and Cliff hunted about on the chart for the figure that would show a depth of fifty fathoms.

"No bottom at sixty!" called the leadsman.

Cliff cursed. The flashlight was not very bright and there were so many tiny figures on the chart. After a number of casts, with no appreciable change in depth, Cliff gave up in despair, and told the men to " 'vast heaving."

THROUGHOUT the night Cliff stayed on the bridge. He was in a mortal panic. He thought of mines, of submarines, of hidden rocks, of all kinds of danger. He met a vessel outward bound.

Cliff was going to give her one blast of the whistle to show her he meant to hold course and speed, and pass to starboard of her, but he remembered just in time that he had no lights and that the other ship could not see him. Her green light was barely visible and she was not a great distance away.

The *Saugus* limped on through the darkness. It was very hazy and black, and Cliff hoped he wouldn't run by any lighthouses. He had no fear of piling her up as yet, for they were too far at sea. In the small hours, that is to say at about six bells in the mid-watch, he took another cast of the lead and found bottom at twenty-seven fathoms.

"What's the bottom?" called Cliff.

"Hard sand, sir," came the reply.

An inspection of the chart showed a bank, very close to the red sector of Cape Henry Light. When the light glittered redly, Cliff hugged himself. He had previously noted on the chart that Cape Charles Light bore almost due north from a beacon that showed a red flash.

When he was between the two last, he took the bearings of Cape Henry a point on the port bow—and with twenty-seven fathoms under foot, he had a pretty good idea of where he was.

He passed the pilot boat without signal, in fact he did not notice it at all, and proceeded calmly along. The *Saugus'* engines were turning over dead slow and the set of the current that Cliff had read about in the "Sailing Directions" had got hold of the ship in the last few hours and was carrying her on quite swiftly.

This increased speed would not show on the log, for the log shows a ship's progress through the water, not her actual speed from point to point. He had picked up some buoys that either were lighted or had bells or whistles on them and these kept him satisfied as to his position.

At daybreak the lead showed no bottom at sixty, so he was past the bank, and when the water began to shoal, he cheerfully headed for the channel buoys.

"This is easy as rolling off a log," he assured himself.

These buoys showed flashes, red to be kept on the starboard hand, and white to be be kept to port. They blinked at him through the mist of dawn.

The mist rose, Cape Henry was blotted out, the shore line went out, and Cliff tore his hair with rage.

"Of course," he cried, "a cursed fog had to come up just as I was getting in. It will burn off with the sun, though, before I am out of the channel, so I will keep boldly on."

The bell on the seaward end of the channel tinkled to port.

"Steady as she is," Cliff ordered the helmsman, rang the engine room to stand by, had the lead cast and found thirty-four fathoms, and then he sent the quartermaster to have the anchors broken out and everything in readiness to anchor.

"I feel like an admiral again," said Cliff, "but I'd better knock wood."

This he did on the chart desk. After a time another black buoy rose out of the mist and slid slowly by, much too near the *Saugus* for comfort. Cliff put the helm over a point or two. If he got out of the channel in the fog, he'd be in a sorry mess.

He heard horns and tooted his own. The other horns were giving two long blasts, whatever that meant, and Cliff feared they might run him down, save that the sound was quite faint. He could also hear bells ringing rapidly.

"I'll have a lot of company," he thought, "when this fog clears. I bet they'll be surprized when they see us appear in their midst with a bow all broken in!"

The leadsman gave a howl and there was a great clattering alongside. Cliff leaped to the starboard wing and looked over. A buoy was bumping along the *Saugus'* plates.

"No. 4" it said on its crimson side. Cliff hurriedly consulted the chart. "No. 4" was the second channel buoy, and he had passed its black companion, moored opposite, several minutes before.

"Mark under water thirty," sang the leadsman.

The last cast had showed thirty-five fathoms and Cliff knew at once that he was out of the channel.

"Forward there!" he hailed. "Stand by starboard anchor."

"Can't use starboard anchor, sir," came the reply. "The hawse pipe's crushed in."

"How about the port?"

"Port's all right, sir."

"Stand by, then, and stand clear port chain!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

NOW what had happened to the *Saugus* was this: The tide sweeps into the Chesapeake with considerable force, as the bay is a tidal basin with a narrow outlet, and the tide surging up the bay is reflected back from the land at the head. This reflex wave had caught the poor *Saugus* with her two knots an hour of way, and had swung her head across the channel, at the same time pushing her seaward.

Her engines were turning ahead and she had just enough sternboard to come to anchor without tearing her shattered bows out, so when Cliff gave the order to let go, and to veer thirty-five fathoms, she came to rest very easily.

The anchor went down with a tremendous splash and a great rattling of chain.

"Thirty-five fathoms at the windlass," called the bosun.

"That'll do," called Cliff, and shut down the engines.

"There," he said, "we're all safe until the fog lifts. I'll run down and see how Mr. Curran is, and then have breakfast."

Cliff knocked at Mr. Curran's door.

"Come in!" called the fourth mate, very much awake for that early hour.

Cliff went in. To his surprize the engineer had entered just before him, for he was twisting his cap and had not yet taken a seat. Perhaps this was because the tiny room was rather crowded. Besides the engineer, there were two very husky seamen, and the quartermaster who had been on watch when Cape Charles Light had been picked up. Cliff looked his astonishment.

Mr. Curran lay propped up on the pillows, very much changed in appearance. He was shaved, his hair was combed, and the gap in his jaw had been filled with teeth. He looked very capable and stern and not at all like the old Curran of the dirty corduroys.

"Good morning," said Cliff, after an embarrassing silence.

"Be —— to you!" replied Mr. Curran. "I want to know what you're doing on this ship."

The fourth mate's eye was too coldly hostile to belong to a man who was out of his head.

"I happen to be in command here," replied Cliff. "Have you been drinking? I needn't remind you that you are addressing an officer of the United States Navy."

"You're no more a Naval officer than I am King of England!" replied Curran. "Were you connected with those Germans, or what are you? Speak up!"

Cliff turned to the engineer.

"Will you look after Mr. Curran?" he said. "I think he's delirious. Maybe putting his false teeth back affected his mind."

Curran gasped and then swore horribly, but he soon weakened and lay back, breathing heavily. The engineer twisted his cap and looked nervously from one to the other. The quartermaster spoke up vindictively.

"I'll say he ain't no officer," he cried. "When we nearly run down that schooner he didn't have sense enough to know that she had the right of way, and he near cut her in two. An' he sends me to stand by the log so's he could see when the tide began to pull her in! Ha! Ha!"

"I'll have you in irons for that," said Cliff. "I've spoken to you often enough for slack work and I suppose you hold a grudge for that reason. I'll see about this."

He turned to go out.

"Just a minute!" cried Curran. "What do you mean by pumping me yesterday and then running to Lundstrom and repeating every word? He had a great time laughing in here and telling me that I'd played poker with Davy Jones in another hour. A stone wall for you if you're caught in that uniform.

"Is that why you doused your lights and sneaked away from the destroyers? What do you mean by running into a closed harbor without a pilot?"

"He wants to block the harbor!" cried the quartermaster. "He's stuck her right in the middle of Thimble Shoal Channel an' he's goin' to blow her up!"

"Grab him!" cried Curran to the two sailors.

There were too many men in that room. Cliff could have sworn it was the chief engineer's foot that tripped one of the men, and the other falling over his companion, clawed ineffectually at Cliff's arm.

The quartermaster made one clutch, but a bundle of knuckles smote his nose, and after that he was too busy wiping the claret from his face to have any interest in the further happenings.

Cliff stepped backward over the weatherboard and swiftly to the rail. The two men were hot after him and, his conscience having made a coward of him, he decided that discretion was certainly the better part here, so he vaulted lightly over and splashed into the waters of the bay.

There was a great hubbub on the ship, cries and running feet, a life buoy slapped into the water where Cliff was kicking off his shoes and wriggling out of his blouse. He took a few strokes toward it, and then, shoving the buoy ahead of him in case of emergency, he departed into the fog.

"That was a quick fall from grace," he thought. "Old Curran probably smelled a rat anyway and got the quartermaster to watch me, and I soon enough showed I didn't know what I was doing. So they thought I was a German. That guard understood English after all. Lundstrom left him there on purpose. Well, all the fools aren't dead."

He swam, and floated by clinging to the buoy, alternately. Suddenly he heard the *put-put* of a motor boat, that rapidly drew nearer.

At first he was afraid to call out for fear it might be a police launch, but as the boat bulked out of the mist he saw that it was a fishing boat, piled high with lobster traps. She shot by him, rolling her weather-beaten side and a thin stream of water trickling from her exhaust pipe.

"Ahoy that boat!" Cliff hailed.

The motor was shut off instantly.

"Ahoy yoreself," called a voice, and a red face in a sou'wester peered into the fog.

"Hey!" cried the owner of the face "Give's yore hand, an' come aboard!

"Out fer a mornin' swim?" asked the man, when Cliff had clambered into the boat.

"I fell off one of the ships out there," said Cliff, wringing the water from his clothes, and stepping aft carefully, lest he put his stockinged feet on some biting fish.

"Want to be put ashore?" asked the boatman.

He probably thought that Cliff was "jumping ship" and so did not ply him with questions.

"I wouldn't mind," said Cliff.

"Wall, you jes' set there an' drip an' in a jiffy we-all will be t'home, an' you can get a mite of hot drink int' yore internals."

The boat put-putted away.

"Where do you live?" asked Cliff.

"I live to Ocean View. You-all can git a car fum there fer No'folk."

The boat went cheerfully on its way and Cliff sat and shivered.

BY THE time they had come to land the mist was gone.

"Thar's some 'un done had a collision," said the boatman, pointing to where the *Saugus* lay, "an' he'll ketch merry —— fer puttin' uv her hook down in that channel."

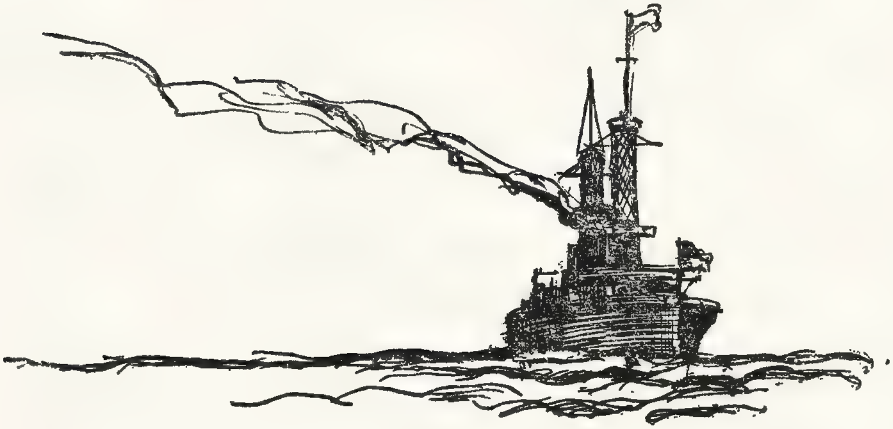
Cliff looked at the *West Saugus.* She lay smack in the channel and tugs were already clustering about her. She was down by the head so that half of her screw and a long stretch of the red sheathing of her underbody stuck out of the water.

"Boy," cried Cliff, "that's what I call luck, to bring that old can in here and get safe to land myself. I'm glad there's nothing in my baggage to identify me. They're liable to raise a hue and cry to find out who I was. I guess this is the end of the voyage. I'll send my old man a telegram and then I'll enlist."

He thought a moment.

"No," he decided, "I guess I'll enlist first. It'll save a lot of discussion."

Then he followed his rescuer up the beach.



RIDE 'IM, COWBOY!

by R. E. Alexander

"LADIES, *an'* gents, next is th' Red
Devil, from th' *upper* head-
Waters o' Bitter Creek. A hoss
Jus' nach-er-al-ly *born* cross,
Raised on sour milk, 'n' eats
Ev'ry dern cowpunch he meets!
Y' never know *which* way he'll jump,
Y' never know jus' *where* he'll dump
Y'—only know he'll *do* it!
If there's a fence he'll throw y' *through* it.
Y' never know which way he'll fall;
Sideways, endways, *both* ways, all—
You'll ride 'im, Bob? *You*, Bill? *Don't* hurry;
Don't *crowd!* What say, kid? Ted Curry,
O' th' Box-Bar 'll ride him,
Without a mother's hand t' guide him!"

Go to it, Ted! *Wow.* Attaboy.
Ride 'im, cowboy! Yee-*ow.* Oy—
Oy—oy—them bran'-new pants!
Shut up! Give th' kid a chance.
Lor*dee!* He let daylight in.
That hoss is Ol' Original *Sin.*
Look at 'im crawfish. *Ride* 'im, Ted!
He'll snap his ears right off his head!
There goes a stirrup. Whoop—whoop*ee!*
A hundred bucks he *does* it—gee,
He's goin' t' roll a cigarette!
He is like *hell.* He *will,* I bet.
Ride 'im, cowboy! Yip! Yip*ee!*
Stay *with* him, Ted! Hooray f'r the
Ol' Box-Bar! They've growed t'gether.
Wow—*wow*—wow! *He's takin' leather!*
He *ain't!* He *did!* He didn't either!
Reckon he's stoppin' f'r a breather—
Look out! He's changin' *ends—good-night!*
Aw, pick 'im up—he *tried*, all right!

JOHN LAW

by Edward Speyer

Author of "Crooked Deals," "The Hard Guys," etc.

TOM CARTWRIGHT enlisted in the State Police because there didn't seem to be anything else to do just then. Just discharged from the Army, late in his return because he had been in the Army of Occupation, jobs were not too plentiful, and besides he liked the idea of a smart uniform, the authority and the possibility of danger and adventure.

"Goin' to be a John Law?" jeered his brother Sam. "Say, ain't you had enough of discipline an' salutin' officers?"

Politeness is wasted between brothers.

"Listen!" said Tom. "Those labor battalions where they kept sending you had fierce discipline, but up to the front we didn't notice it none—an' besides I was a sergeant."

Sam was no whit abashed.

"Take your Croix de Guerre an' your chevrons up to Lansing an' learn how to keep your horse shiny," he retorted. "I'm goin' to Detroit an' pick up some easy money. There's plenty."

So the brothers parted. They were in many ways not unlike, big, strapping lads, farm-bred, fair-haired and blue-eyed, much of a piece in face and in physique. Sam was but a year the elder of Tom, who boasted a scant twenty-two summers. They parted and for four years neither saw the other.

TOM, riding through the home village in his trim black uniform, alighted from his motorcycle to learn that Sam was doing well in Detroit, working for Henry Ford or something, and had the grace to keep to himself his doubts that his brother was doing any really hard work. Sam had always been lazy, adventurous, bold enough, but averse to doing anything like real work. His disposition to shirk had kept him in constant trouble in the Army. He had not changed during his military career and the younger doubted if he ever could change.

Tom had plenty of work, hard, changeful work that satisfied his taste for adventure. The scant forces of the State Police were scattered and shifted to meet the lawless needs of the post-war period. Most of the men were ex-noncommissioned officers of the Army or experienced young policemen, a picked crew, but even among these men Tom managed to make his mark.

His was not only the natural daring, case-hardened by war and a country boy's resourcefulness, which had been heightened by the sudden needs of battle and patrol, for these were common, but in addition, Tom possessed a certain cheery tactfulness. He got along well in districts where the State Police were momentarily none too well liked and he did not have to be hard-boiled in ordering men around. They naturally and cheerfully followed his lead and it was inevitable that he should be promoted.

His promotion shifted him to Rockwood, down the river from Detroit, the preventive center where the police fought their battle against rum-runners. The shift

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brought him, after four years, near to and finally in contact with Sam.

For some time Tom did not get to the big city. He was busy on motorcycle, afoot, in automobiles, or in boats, learning the down-river district, the grass islands where rum-runners hid, the long shore-line where they landed their goods, the network of fine highways over which it was transported, the inland farms where the liquor was cached, roadhouses, blind pigs, the whole locale of his work. It was nearly a month before he donned civilian clothes and drifted in to see the sights.

In Detroit he was off duty in every sense. The State Police rarely interfered with the affairs of the city, and then only when requested by the local police. Tom did not make himself known to these but instead looked up a few old comrades of France. These lads were now largely established in good jobs, engaged in making money and having a good time. They knew their way and took him about and since Tom had no taste for dissipation and loved to dance, the big public dance halls were usually the order of the evening.

This was how he suddenly got track of Sam. It wasn't that Sam danced at these places. As Tom subsequently found out, Sam did his dancing elsewhere and less respectably. Indeed the first herald of Sam was indicative of this as it was a feminine voice behind Tom which cried out:

"Why, Sam Cartwright! What are you doing *here?*"

"Here" was one of the public halls and Tom, as he turned, wondered why Sam shouldn't be here. On his turning, a rather slender blond girl reddened with confusion.

"Oh, I thought you were Sam Cartwright!" she exclaimed.

Tom's ready smile came to the rescue.

"I'm only his brother Tom," he explained.

Sketchy conversation, broken by a dance, followed. They brushed up a rapid dance-hall intimacy during which Tom learned that the girl was called Marion Schmidt and that her father ran a near-beer parlor, while the girl found out that he was Sam's brother—a fact she already knew. At no time will a good policeman give too close an account of himself, and Tom was naturally reticent.

He took the girl home—it was in walking distance of the hall—and because she was not yet twenty and readily accepted him simply as Sam's brother he got some more interesting information.

"Where does Sam live?" he asked her. "I've been here only a few weeks and haven't had time to look him up."

"He's got an apartment up at the Oscoda Apartments," she said, "but he might be over at our place tonight. He sells pa his stuff."

With what he already knew of Pa Schmidt, with what he knew of Sam, it took Tom about thirty seconds to get a clear picture. Pa had a near-beer parlor, in other words a saloon where beer—real beer—and whisky were sold. Sam, selling him his stuff, obviously was a bootlegger. Tom laughed out loud.

"Take me around," he said, "and I'll see."

SCHMIDT'S place was one of hundreds, a brick saloon of the old fashion with a flat above in which the family lived. There was a side entrance into a "Ladies Room," and into this the girl ushered him. It was empty, and she left him seated at a table while she called through a door into the barroom. A stout, red-faced man who had been blond before he was bald, answered her summons.

"This is Tom Cartwright, Sam's brother, Pa," was her introduction. "He wants to see Sam. Has he been here yet?"

"Glad to meet ya," said Schmidt. "No, Sam ain't been here for a week. I ain't seen him. He didn't leave me know nothing and I had a time getting my stuff! Will ya have a beer or a little schnapps, Mr. Cartwright?"

They made Tom cheerfully at home, the girl sitting and drinking beer with him, Schmidt bustling in and out. Presently a little boy stuck his head through the doorway and called:

"Hey, Marion! Ma wants you should come up!"

"All right, Freddie," the girl answered, and turned to Tom. "That's my brother. Ma don't like me to stay down here. Do you want to come up?"

Freely accepted by the Schmidts, liking the girl's ingenuousness and her father's cordiality, Tom was a little ashamed to be sailing under false colors. These were the people he was paid to suppress, but they were pretty decent people. He resolved to tell the girl his trade.

"I can't come up now," he said, "but I'd like to come up some other time if you'll let me. Wait!" he interrupted as she was about to invite him. "I'm Sam's brother, all right, but I'm not in his line of business. Don't let it scare you—but I'm a State Trooper. No fear I'll tip this place, because it's off my beat, we don't work in the city, but I want you to know."

The girl looked at him, astonished for a moment, then she laughed.

"So you're a John Law?" she said. It carried Tom back to his last conversation with his brother. "Well, doesn't it beat all what prohibition does to families! But I like you, John Law, even if I am Jane Lawless. Come visiting any time, but leave your little tin badge behind."

"No fear," said Tom. "When I'm here, I'm off duty and when I'm off duty—I'm off duty."

He was off duty also when he went to the Oscoda Apartments to look up his brother. It was no brotherly affection that took him there but an imperative need of getting in touch with a man who might seriously embarrass him. He had not as yet told his superiors that he had a brother in the liquor trade, feeling that he would first find out how the land lay. He found the house easily, an ornate, if somewhat cheap-looking building; got hold of Sam by the house phone and was bidden to come up.

It was noon, but Sam evidently had just arisen. His pajamas were marvelous, his outer covering a Mandarin coat, and though scarcely brushed and unshaven he still contrived to look sleek and sheikish, a contrast to his bronzed and rugged brother.

"So here's the policeman at last," was his greeting as he shoved a litter from a chair and bade Tom sit down. "How are arrests?"

"I haven't got a warrant for you yet, Sam," Tom retorted.

They started immediately on the old brotherly footing.

"So this visit isn't official? Well, even if it was, it's too late. I'm out of the importing business."

"That's a good thing."

"Yes," said Sam, "it isn't the game it used to be. The big profits are gone. Give you boys credit, you've made it hard for us. Between losing cargoes and the high prices over in Canada—and something else—it's tight money. It's hard work, now, and the moonshiners are cutting in, too."

"No wonder you quit, if it's work," Tom jeered.

Sam only grinned.

"You're right," he admitted. "You're the only working fool in the Cartwright family. How did you find me? Sleuth me to my den?"

"No, just met a girl that knows you."

"Girl?" said Sam, wrinkling his brows. "Oh! Marion Schmidt. She knows where I live. Quite a girl. Are you trying to make her?"

Tom ignored the question. He was casting about in his brain trying to imagine just what Sam was doing and had figured that it might be anything. He did not ask, but instead cut in with:

"I'm glad you've cut out running the stuff. We'd get you sooner or later and it isn't much fun having to rap off your own brother."

"Never mind," said Sam smiling. "I may give you some business later."

Tom did not offer to stay long and Sam did not press him. The policeman spent some hours attempting to figure what his brother might be up to. He did not doubt Sam's word that he had quit bootlegging nor did he do him the honor to place any legitimate employment among the occupations considered, but he hoped for the best. Sam might be engaged in some sort of flimflam game, fake stocks or something of that type which did not interest the active arm of the State Police.

Nevertheless he reported all circumstances to his superiors and hazarded the guess that Sam was up to no good.

"Well, if he isn't" the captain said, "sooner or later we'll know what he's doing."

So that was that.

It left Tom with an easy conscience to pursue his friendship with Marion Schmidt and after the first call he was well enough received. Pa Schmidt had bridled a little at the start.

"Why for," asked the old man testily, "do young fellers like you join the State Police to enforce fool laws?"

"Prohibition isn't the only law we enforce," Tom said with his famous smile.

"As for joining up, why do you run a saloon? We have to live."

"Pah! Laws!" said Schmidt.

"Sure, laws," said Tom. "If it wasn't for a few policemen—a few John Laws—you wouldn't be able to run an honest beer store without being stuck up every few hours."

Schmidt snorted. However, he mollified as visits increased and Mrs. Schmidt, as soon as she had conquered her suspicion that Tom was up to something, became friendly in a motherly sort of way. Freddie, the little boy, took to him unreservedly. First it was the big pistol which Tom never was without. With the cartridges carefully extracted, Freddie was permitted to play with this. Various feats of strength won him further, and marvelous stories sealed the friendship. Sometimes Tom did not know whether he was calling on Marion or Freddie. The girl was always friendly, but she jeered his trade incessantly.

"The law is a hot sketch," was her attitude. "And you—thirty dollars a month for an upstanding American!"

She had somehow got the idea that his pay was that of a private in the Army and he did not explain.

The homelike air of the Schmidt flat pleased Tom. He grew to like Marion despite of—or perhaps because of—her good-natured abuse and the friendliness of the family increased. He saw nothing of Sam and heard nothing of him except a dubious remark by Schmidt who, one evening volunteered with a shaking head—

"Your brother Sam, I hear a lot of no good about him."

Tom waited for him to go on, but Schmidt said no more and Tom did not press him.

THEN something happened. The stairway to the Schmidt flat rose from the end of the hall at the side of the building. To reach it, one had to pass the entrance to the Ladies' Room. This evening, near midnight, when Tom and Marion were returning from a dance, the door stood open and as they passed it Tom noted a slight commotion in the barroom. Instinctively he paused and as he did so he heard the words—

"Put 'em up!"

"Stay put!" he shot at Marion and dived into the Ladies' Room.

With his gun ready, he flung open the door into the barroom and saw what he expected—one man with a gun drawn at the door, another at the bar and a third man rounding the end of the bar, the customers herded into the corner.

Tom came shooting. The suddenness of his attack and the accuracy of his fire squashed the holdup flat. He got the man at the bar, then the man at the end of the bar, without return fire. The man at the door shot once, missed and lost his nerve. He turned to run and Tom's third bullet caught him in the small of the back and flattened him in the entrance. The roar of a motor told Tom that a fourth man, the driver, had fled.

Everything had happened in the space of three trigger pulls, but the hush hung for seconds, during which Tom heard behind him a long drawn out "Ge-e-e-e!" and knew that Marion had disobeyed orders and followed him. He did not turn his head but walked swiftly into the barroom, flashing his badge as he came.

"Call the police!" he ordered Schmidt, who was behind the bar wiping his bald head with a bar towel. Then he turned to the crowd. "You fellows keep quiet till the flyer comes."

He walked over to the men he had shot. Two were stone dead, hit high in the head. The heavy bullet had caught the man who stood in the doorway in the spine and smashed its way through. He was still living when Tom reached him, but died before he could be lifted.

All three were young chaps, just at the end of or just out of their teens, well dressed, somewhat too well dressed, unmasked, smooth of face and sleek of hair, the latest thing in city bandits. They could, without causing comment, go almost everywhere.

Tom stood guard over the bodies till the arrival of the city police. He stood by while they heard the varying versions of the holdup, reported his share of the affair to the lieutenant, who knew him by name, and then made ready to go. Schmidt stopped him.

"We close now," he said as the police departed. "I am too nervous to stay open. Come upstairs. I have something to say."

Willing enough, Tom followed him through the back room to the flat. Marion, who had fled before the police arrived, was on hand, her mother fluttering around, but Freddie—as the boy learned later to his disgust—had slept peacefully through the entire engagement.

"You did pretty well, John Law," said Marion with less than her usual jeering note as they were seated.

"That's one of the laws we enforce," Tom said grimly.

Even a year at the front and four years of police work will not make the business of killing men an easy one. Schmidt appreciated his feeling.

"A little schnapps, mama," he said, and poured reverently when she had brought the bottle. "A little from the old saloon—*ach*, me, the old saloon."

They drank a solemn toast—to the old saloon, apparently

"Tommie," said Schmidt as they sat down their glasses, "you know what you done? You killed three of Sam's boys."

"So that's it?" He remembered Sam's hint of "something else," and an easier way of making money.

"Yes," said Schmidt. "Sam he come to me and he says he is out of the bootlegging business—he is selling protection now.

" 'For what and how much?' I ask.

" 'Against holdups and raids,' he says, 'an' for you a hundred dollars a week.'

" 'An awful lot of money,' I says.

" 'But you're awful liable to be held up,' says he. I see what he means. He is hi-jacking.

"So I says yes and pay, but last week he says times are hard and he wants two hundred. Then I get mad and don't pay nothing, so tonight—you see."

He poured another drink nervously.

"What do you think he'll do?" he asked.

"Something pretty mean," was the scant comfort Tom could give him. "Lay off selling hard stuff for a few days and see the police. I'll see the captain."

Tom did better than that. He stepped into headquarters and told the story and within an hour Sam was being sought—and not found. Tom saw his captain and the roads were watched, but till six o'clock next evening nothing was heard. Then Schmidt received an unsigned, typed note. It read.

> You were lucky with that big John Law but he got three of my boys and I'll fix him and fix you so that you'll be glad to pay me everything you own.

When Tom read the note he wondered and was glad that he had ridden into town on a motorcycle in full uniform. A man on a motorcycle is a bad target, a black uniform does not make a good bull's-eye at night.

"Does he mean bombing?" Schmidt asked.

Tom shook his head.

"Maybe," he said, "but probably not."

Plain clothes men as inconspicuous as the Eiffel Tower were detailed to guard Schmidt's place, and the search for Sam went on unabated, but for some days nothing happened except that Schmidt's nerves grew tighter. On the fifth day, Sam, from hiding somewhere, struck. Freddie, on his way from school, was whisked away by three men in a car.

Ordinarily, the news would have been some time in reaching Schmidt and so the police. Freddie would have been waited for, then searched for, then reported. But a little girl saw the kidnaping and ran screaming to the traffic officer on duty at the school.

He happened to be intelligent and twenty minutes later every road out of Detroit was being patroled and squads were searching for three men, a Lincoln car, and a small boy. Ten minutes later an airplane was circling the city to watch for cars that appeared to be going too fast, but Freddie, like Sam, had vanished.

"He's within fifteen miles of where he started from," Tom told his captain, "and that's something."

"Fifteen miles is a big circle," said the officer. "I'm afraid the next move is his."

It was. It came in the form of a note through the mails, and brought in the postoffice in an effort to trace it. The letter was simple. It read:

> I want $50,000, all in bills. I'll give you a week to get it. I'll tell you later where to send it. Meanwhile the boy is all right but after a week I'll cut his ears off and maybe do worse, if the cops get too close.

There was one other thing about the letter that was important. It was typewritten, but it might better have been written by hand for it showed a thumb and third fingerprint that agreed with a set of Sam's fingers which the police had obtained three years before on a minor matter. This was real evidence, and a warrant for Sam was easy to obtain. It was binding, even if Sam were caught without the boy. Captured, Sam was doomed.

To catch him was the problem. He might be in the city, but officers on the beats and specially assigned detectives tried in vain to locate a strange boy. The underworld was willing to be helpful. It did not sympathize with Sam, holding kidnaping a dirty trick and Schmidt after all a friend, if not a member, but it seemed to have no information. Sam was hidden from friends as well as foes. Outlying sections drew blanks for State Police and sheriff's deputies.

Schmidt went about in a despairing effort to raise fifty thousand dollars. He knew he could not do this, but it gave him some comfort to try. Mrs. Schmidt was dissolved in tears.

Marion, when she met Tom, was scornful.

"You're a fine lot of John Laws," she told him. "The whole lot of you can't find one little boy."

"We'll get him for you, Marion," Tom assured her.

He felt some confidence in this because, while he knew that if they are willing to go to the last extreme the advantage is all with the kidnapers, he did not believe that Sam had either the nerve or the necessary cruelty. So he was hopeful, though four blank days passed.

Again a note, this time not from Sam, but unsigned and badly printed, mailed to the sheriff and arriving late one afternoon.

> They're at Stack's Farm. He done me a good turn once.

Some time, somewhere, Schmidt had fed or given a drink to or paid the fine of some rat from the depths and, fearful, but none the less true to his code, the rat had returned good for good. Next was to locate the farm, then to organize the raid.

The first was easy. Half a dozen men of two forces knew every detail of the stand of tumbled buildings. There had been a still there once and the sheriff had raided it. State Police had looked there for stolen cars. They knew the lay of the land, the ill reputation of the tenant of that bit of wasteland, a man who called himself Grange but seemed to be a Pole.

Though a night raid was not the most desirable thing, providing darkness as a cover for escape, delay could not be thought of as it offered too good a chance to shift quarters if suspicion were aroused. Only one question remained in the captain's mind—whether to take Tom or to leave Tom. The big trooper was undoubtedly his best man, had already of his own volition worked hard on the case, but in the raid it might come to shooting his own brother. He decided to put it up to Tom.

"Sergeant," he said, "I think we've got your brother Sam. We're raiding tonight. It's up to you to come or stay behind."

"I'll come," Tom said grimly. "He's my brother—but that doesn't matter one way or another. If it was just bootlegging, perhaps not, though I told him what he would get. But he's sent me word that he's gunning for me—and besides I'm mighty fond of the kid."

So he made one of the raiding party. The State Police left quietly in two big cars, the troopers in uniform, to join a like force of deputies. Before they left Tom looked over the cars and said to the captain:

"They're not fast enough. Remember, Sam's got a speedy boat."

"You and Dorgan take motorcycles," he was told, and thus mounted on high speed vehicles, the two followed.

LIGHTS out, the police cars swung from the highway to the dirt road leading to the farm. The State cars stopped and were emptied of men except for the drivers and one extra man in the fastest car as a possible pursuing force. The sheriff's cars drove past the farm about a mile and then also disgorged their men. They were pulled partly across the road to block it. The men spread out and gradually a wide circle of armed officers was thrown about Stack's farm. Slowly it closed in.

Tom and Dorgan, wheeling their motorcycles, went cautiously up the road to the drive into the farmyard. Just as they reached the entrance there was a roar and a big, black bulk charged away from the farmhouse. Something had gone wrong, a scout, perhaps, had reported, and the kidnapers, lights out, were fleeing. A trooper, near the house, fired but fearing to hit the boy fired low.

The car skidded up the road and headed in the direction of the sheriff's autos. No commands were needed for Tom and Dorgan to start their motors and leap to the chase or for the State Police car left in readiness a quarter of a mile down the road to come into action. As it passed the farm, two troopers flung themselves blindly on it and were carried along, making the fighting force in the car four.

Tom, closing in on the kidnapers, took one shot at the tires and drew fire. It did not worry him, as he was almost invisible in the darkness, but he thought that he heard the boy cry out in the car and was cold with horror at the knowledge that the big machine was speeding to where the sheriff's cars blocked the road, a scant half mile away.

Almost before he had time to think, that danger was past. The kidnapers' driver spotted the black bulk of the obstruction, flashed on his lights, took the ditch with a terrific bump and was back on the road. Tom shot his motorcycle along the edge of the ditch and was with them, but Dorgan was not so fortunate. He was ditched and Tom was alone in the pursuit.

His only chance, he saw, was to cripple the fleeing auto. The occupants could see him more or less and intermittent shots studded the chase, but Tom held his fire and closed, leaning over the side of his motorcycle for cover much as a trick rider leans to pick up a handkerchief.

It was a terrible risk at the speed, but a bullet was worse. Three feet from the big left rear tire he fired and pulled to the left. The long scream of departing air reached him as he darted past the slowing, swerving machine. Somebody fired but was wild.

The car, retarded, bumping horribly but not disabled, kept on. The big headlights were turned on and Tom had the unhappy consciousness that he was a perfect target on a black road. Though he kept well ahead of long pistol range, he wove from side to side to distort the aim. His hope was that the sheriff's cars and the slower police car would close in on the kidnapers.

Suddenly, by the fact that he was leaving the lights, he knew that this was happening, that the big car had stopped and that the kidnapers were scattering. He wrenched his motorcycle around and headed in. A fusillade broke out and he fired at one of the flashes. Something struck and disabled his motorcycle, but at that instant spotlights from the police cars began sweeping the fields.

He heard the sharp crack of a carbine fired from one of the cars and saw a running man stumble. Then, as he freed himself from his motorcycle, he saw a man crashing toward him in the ditch, covered from the lights, and fire of the police. As he leaped into the ditch to meet him, he realized that it was Sam.

Tom lifted his gun and shouted, "Stop!" The brother's answer was a shot, but Tom did not fire. Instead he ran forward, putting away his gun. He was near enough to hear the click of Sam's hammer falling on an empty cartridge, telling him that his brother had loosed his last shot. Then he dived for the swift-moving spot that was Sam.

It was a risky thing to do in the darkness, for Sam's knee caught him in the chest as he came, but nevertheless the trooper obtained a grip. It was not a good one, but in Tom's powerful hands it served. Sam could not break away.

Lazy he might be, but Sam was no coward. He had a chance for freedom and he knew it, smashing blindly at Tom's head to free himself. The younger brother took two blows, smiling grimly in the dark, shifted his hold so that he had a bear's grip around Sam's body.

They fell, and in the confused struggle Sam managed to hook his arm about Tom's head, pressing his head back, but in the squirming battle Tom pinned down Sam's left arm with his leg and drove with his fist to where he knew Sam's head must be.

The pull on his head relaxed and Tom twisted his head free, pinned the other arm and slowly used his free hand to choke Sam into submission. The end came so suddenly that he was suspicious. But clean, hard life told over the worn and jaded powers and Sam collapsed. Tom dragged him from the ditch toward the car, not even bothering for handcuffs.

"Here he is," he said, and flung him on the ground by the headlights.

Tom was rumpled and dirty, one side of his face was swollen where Sam's blows had landed, but the unconscious man was a far worse sight. Both eyes were closed, his mouth, opened to gasp for breath, was twisted, Tom's powerful holds had torn his fine but flimsy clothes.

The rest of the men were rounded up. One was dead from some one's bullet; two more men, dejected and somewhat battered sheik bandits, stood by, swinging handcuffed hands.

"Where's the kid?" said Tom suddenly.

In the excitement of battle the object of the raid had been forgotten. They looked in the car, but he was not there. They threatened their captives, who looked astonished. Then they started searching the fields.

"Freddie! Freddie!" Tom called, and suddenly a wee, dirty, tearful figure popped from the ditch and made a bee-line for the big trooper.

Arms clutched around Tom's neck; tears wet his damaged ear.

"They threw me out!" wailed Freddie. "Sam threw me out! He promised me a ride and I tore my pants!"

"You better take him home, Tom," said the captain. "He knows you. He'll be scared with the rest of us."

* * *

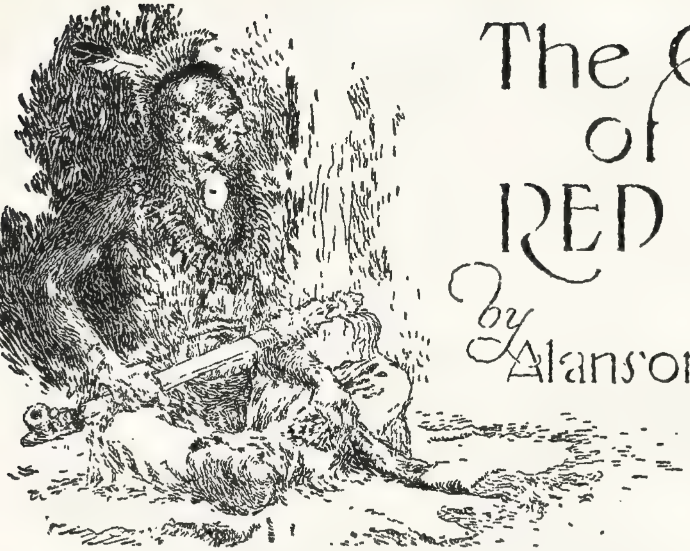
SO, driven by a deputy sheriff and escorted by his favorite sergeant of the State Police, Freddie Schmidt started home. Tom was worrying about breaking the news, but he need not have given it a thought. A block away he was spied, the news cried ahead, and by the time they had reached their destination, not only the Schmidts, but customers, neighbors, bystanders and passers-by were gathered, shouting.

Tom felt as if he were being mobbed, held the boy high, and shouldered through the crowd. The deputy left his car and helped. Finally they managed to break the outsiders from the family and herd all who belonged there safely inside the flat. Not till then did Tom surrender the boy to his mother.

Schmidt was all abeam, his wife in intervals of hugging the rescued boy showed a disposition to hug Tom. Even Marion patted his shoulder, squeezed his arm.

"You did pretty well, John Law," she said without a trace of a jeer.

"Yeh," said Tom with his wide, slow smile, "that's another of the laws we enforce."



The QUEST of RED ELK

by Alanson Skinner

Author of "The Honor of the Sioux," "Dry Stick," etc.

IN THE year 1832 the largest earth lodge in the great Iowa Indian village on the Des Moines was that of No-Heart-of-Fear, the chief. Full fifty feet in diameter, by twenty feet high, with its covered doorway at the eastern side running out a dozen feet, it reared its bulk like a small round hill above the other earth and bark lodges. It was dark inside, and cool, with the damp coolness of a cellar. A little light streamed downward through the smoke-hole in the center of the roof, but the only other illumination was caused by the bright dancing flames of a lusty fire that lighted even the farthest corners of the abode. It showed the bunks along the wall, shut off with painted buffalo-hide curtains, the litter of pottery kettles, wooden mortars, pestles, grinding stones and wooden bowls and buffalo horn spoons that lay on the floor.

In the extreme rear of the lodge one could glimpse through the thin veil of aromatic wood smoke a collection of oval bundles, festooned with scalps, to which were lashed pipe stems, war clubs, and other sacred objects. Directly under these holy things squatting on a heavy buffalo robe, was old No-Heart-of-Fear himself.

A huge, rugged man, whose age had not yet begun to shrink his sinews nor frost his hair. A very strong man, an intelligent man, a determined man, yet, withal, a kindly one, despite the squareness of his jaw. Naked to the waist was No-Heart-of-Fear. His breast was simply tattooed with the honor marks of his clan.

About his neck and over his shoulders was draped a splendid necklace made of the claws of the grizzly bear, wrapped with otter fur. His head was shaven, except for a roach of his own black hair that ran from just back of his forehead to his nape, and was surmounted by an ornament of scarlet-dyed deer's hair, from which arose a single snow-white eagle feather, with a jetty tip.

On his legs were handsome deerskin leggings skin-tight, with great ankle flaps, slightly decorated with a scroll design in porcupine quills and heavily fringed with wisps of human scalps. Moccasins with light rawhide soles covered his feet. In his hand he held a long pipe, the stem of which was wrapped with porcupine quillwork, with the scalps of ducks and woodpeckers with brilliant plumage, empaled upon it. The bowl was of red pipestone and carved to represent the face of an old man, gazing back at the smoker.

Like a graven image No-Heart-of-Fear sat there, smoking. The only sign of life that he gave was the constant issuing of smoke from his nostrils. Yet the old warrior was alert and watching for some one.

A light step was heard in the passageway without, and a younger man by forty years stepped into the gloom of the lodge and stood a moment in the full firelight. His dress was similar to that of the elder, but far more elaborate. No scalps garnished his leggings of snowy tanned doeskin, but they were graceful with inordinately long fringe. Beautiful floral and scroll figures in the finest quill work covered both his leggings and his moccasins, while his long shirt of antelope skin was equally beautified. His head was not shaved, and his long black locks flowed over his broad shoulders, shining with oil in the firelight.

He carried no weapon, but bore instead the entire skin of a bald eagle, the tail of which, distended and adorned with bright colored strips of quills, served him for a fan. He was a very handsome and picturesque figure as he stood there, and the fire, as it leaped up and disclosed his face, showed in his features so smooth and velvety, so girlish in their curves, a refined and softer image of the stern face of the older man before him.

No-Heart-of-Fear set down his pipe and motioned the younger man to sit beside him on the buffalo robe.

"My son," began the old Iowa, in deep resonant tones that rang through the earth lodge, "I have sent for you because my heart is troubled. I am becoming an old man. In the course of a few more winters I shall no longer lead my people and you will be chief. My son, you are not a man! You had rather loll about the village watching the women than go hunting. You would rather be dressed like some pretty singing bird than wear the trophies of war. When the warriors start out to battle you are never among them. Even now you bear in your hand a fan, and not a war club! Yet you are to be chief! Alas, my people! Who will defend them from the fierce Dakota? Who will ward off the blows of the Osage? How will they escape the wrath of the Commanche?"

"What you say is true, my father," said the young man humbly. "My blood has always turned to water at the sound of shots or the war whoop! I am not a man! Yet, I shall be chief, when you have gone to our ancestors. What will you have me do?"

"My son, there is much to be done, before you can build up your name; and build it up you must, if our people are to respect you! If your mother had had a brother to train you it would have been different, for it is an uncle's duty, rather than a father's, to teach a boy. But now it has reverted to me. Go out against the enemy! If you are one of the first two to strike a foeman, alive or dead, that is a great honor, and the people will praise you! If you cut off and carry away the head of a slain enemy, that is an honor! If you scalp a fallen warrior, that is to your credit! And if you lead a warparty successfully, without losing a man, that is the greatest of all—if you do so four times in succession, as I have done, then you will go down in the history of our people, forever!

"But you, my son, have done nothing! Who would follow a lazy idler, a fop, a dandy, into battle? You must begin small and work up! Go out now, and do something that will make me proud of you until the end of my days! Increase your name! If you are shot, and the wound is in your back, I shall feel my heart break with shame! If you are found dead, with your wounds in front, my heart will be proud that you died like a man!"

The fire had died down a little, and the light was dim. Fumbling in the dark, old No-Heart-of-Fear found his pipe and tobacco pouch. He filled the stone bowl with steady fingers, took a hot coal from the fire between his horny thumb and forefinger and placed it on the tobacco. He puffed strongly, blowing a cloud of smoke to the four directions, to earth and to sky, and passed the pipe to his son, who smoked it to the end. Then, silently, the younger man arose and stripped off his elegant shirt and leggings. From a sleeping bunk along the wall he produced a plain fringeless pair of leggings and a small buffalo robe. His fan he tossed aside contemptuously, and his father, noting the act, came forward and handed him an ancient war club. Short it was, dark with age, with smoke and blood. Its short curved handle ended in a ball carved from a knot, in one piece with the haft, and surmounted by the figure of an otter, whose head peered over the globular striking end.

The older man also hung about the neck of the youth a sharp, two-edged knife in a rawhide sheath, ornamented with coarse white and blue glass beads, and pressed on him a small sack filled with pounded corn meal and half a dozen pairs of moccasins. Then the old chief strained the younger man close to his breast for a moment and pushed him away bruskly. The older man returned to his seat by the dead fire and the youth, with strong, elastic steps, passed out of the lodge without a word.

Outside, the sun was slipping down under the horizon. The barking of dogs had begun to take on an evening shrillness, and shadows were growing strangely long. Red Elk, the youth, paused and looked in all four directions, past the lodges of his people, out over the Des Moines, the bottoms, with their growth of cottonwoods, and the wide prairies beyond. The question was in which way to bend his footsteps—where might adventure and danger lurk?

He chose the north.

Half a mile from the village, on a small hill, he saw a disconsolate figure, and as he approached it in the gathering dusk it gradually resolved itself into the form of a young woman of his people, with bowed head, blackened face and disheveled hair, whose slight frame was shaken with wailing.

"Oh younger sister, for what reason are you weeping? Is your lover dead?"

The girl raised her head, and, seeing who it was who addressed her, she exclaimed contemptuously:

"Yes! A better man than you are, Red Elk, has gone to our ancestors! Already the people called his name 'Scalp Taker,' that far had he built himself up! And they have killed him, the Sioux dogs, and there is no one to avenge him! I have no brothers, nor had he, who lived alone with his grandmother! Oh, if I were only a man, and a chief's son, I would show them!"

"*Hau*, Four-Winds-Woman! It so happens that I am just now looking for a chance to throw myself away! When did it happen? After all, the Dakota breed men and I am as willing that a Dakota should carry home my scalp as any one! Where did it happen?"

"Why, every night we used to meet down at the Elbow Bend of the river. My lover, White Cloud, had a little flute of cedar, and he would go there and call me with our secret call, and I would hear and go to meet him. Some men of the Wahpekutay band of the Dakota, on the warpath, slipped up and heard him. They waited until they had learned his call, then they crawled close and knocked him on the head and scalped him. And that is not all. The dogs lay there and called and called, hoping to catch me. I came last evening, wondering where White Cloud had hidden himself, but the call was strange a little and I discovered them and crawled close enough to hear them laugh and boast about it. Then I fled away, unseen, and they do not know it. Perhaps even tonight they will be at it again at dark. The Dakota do not give up so easily, and they may still hope to catch me. I have told no one yet, for it is in my heart to obtain vengeance alone, myself."

"*Hau*," said Red Elk. "Well, little sister, I think that I will keep that appointment for you. I am not one to disappoint a party of Wahpekutay Sioux who have come so far looking for trouble."

Without hesitation Red Elk ran swiftly along the river toward the Elbow Bend, for the trysting hour was now well at hand and he was anxious to show his metal.

"Maon the Earthmaker must have had pity on me, indeed, to send me an adventure so soon after my father had shamed me!" he thought. "Well, I can not go back to my father's lodge alive now, without something to tell him."

IT was nearly a mile from the little hillock where he had met Four-Winds-Woman to the Elbow Bend, but the distance was quickly covered by Red Elk's racing moccasins. Just before he arrived at the trysting place he slackened his pace and glanced at his knife. It slipped easily and quickly from its sheath as he grasped it. His moccasins, bag of corn and buffalo robe, in a small bundle on his back, he took off and was about to conceal under a log, when an idea caused him to smile. He unrolled the buffalo robe, and flung it over his head and shoulders.

"Those dogs expect a woman," he said, half aloud. "My skin is smooth, and my hair is long—maybe I can deceive them. A pity I did not ask that girl how many there were! Well, the more Sioux, the more glory! The more I will have to boast about! There can not be many, it is too far from the Wahpekutay country; a warparty would have to be very large in order to be able to stand off all whom they might meet, or very small to slip by unseen. Four, maybe, is the exact number that I will have to face. Four is a sacred number among the Dakota. It would never be five or three. If they were Iowa now, or Oto, or even Osage, it might be seven."

Thus thinking, with his knife in his free right hand and his war club thrust in his belt, Red Elk went on quietly, imitating a girl's shuffling walk and hiding his height as much as possible by crouching under his blanket. He had not gone far before he heard the quavering strains of an Indian flute.

Without the appearance of undue caution, Red Elk walked leisurely toward the spot. On a fallen log he could dimly discern the figure of a tall young man dressed in what seemed to be Iowa costume, who was blowing softly on the flute. He went directly to him.

"Is that you, beloved?" he asked in his own language.

The Dakota made no reply but rose and threw a brawny arm about his waist, his mouth opened, as if to give a triumphant war whoop, but he gasped, blood ran from his lips and nostrils, and he collapsed limply, as Red Elk drove his keen knife deep between his ribs and pushed away. In an instant Red Elk had dragged the body off into the bushes and taken the scalp. He made a quick incision between the ribs of the fallen Sioux, thrust in his hand, and tore out the warm and reeking heart. He raised it to his lips as if to eat it, but his knees gave and his stomach heaved. A horrible revulsion of feeling swept over him, and, sick almost to death, the young Iowa hurled the heart away from him into the gloom of the cottonwoods. He sat down, filled with horror and disgust.

"Alas!" he groaned, "I am not a man! How is it possible to eat a human heart? Ugh! Wah! I would rather be killed first! I——"

"*Hau, Koda!*"

A guttural voice spoke in his ear, and he partly understood the Sioux words that followed to be a question as to his success in the quest for the Iowa maiden. The Sioux had come upon him in the darkness and thought him to be their missing comrade. Red Elk sprang up quickly and saw three tall warriors in full paint and with huge warbonnets almost upon him. There was no time for the knife which lay at his feet, so he snatched out his war club.

"I am called Red Elk, the son of No-Heart-of-Fear, and this is the way I am accustomed to avenge my people!" he barked, leaping on the first Dakota.

There was a crunching sound, and the Dakota fell heavily, but the other two were upon Red Elk, catching and clutching at him with their bare hands. They were powerful men, both of them, but the darkness was to Red Elk's advantage. They dared not use their knives in the gloom, lest they stab one another, and they were at too close grips for war clubs. Over logs and through briars and mud holes they stumbled, now rolling over and over, now swaying upright. The Dakota fought noiselessly, fearing to alarm the Iowa encampment, and the Iowa had neither breath to call out, nor desire to do so, if he had had. So far the Earthmaker had been with him. He prayed to Maon again, in his heart, to help once more.

As they struggled Red Elk felt the hands of one Sioux grip his throat. The Dakota was evidently not certain whether he held his enemy or his comrade, and he did not dare put forth all his strength. Quickly Red Elk squirmed about, bringing his knee into the stomach of his adversary. There was a groan and cough, and the Sioux seemed to fade away in the dark. The other had his arms around the Iowa's waist, and Red Elk, with a mighty effort, broke one away and whirled about. The Dakota pinioned him by both wrists and gave an exclamation of triumph that ended in a snarl, for Red Elk, pinioned though he was by an iron grip, had set his teeth in the windpipe of his adversary and was hanging on like a wolf trying to drag down a buffalo calf.

In vain the writhing Dakota beat at Red Elk's face with his bare hands. In vain his nails tore great gashes in the youth's skin. With the grip of a snapping turtle Red Elk hung on, relaxing his body so that his full weight depended from his teeth. There was a rending sound, a great gush of blood blinded his eyes, and Red Elk fell clear, while the Sioux, with a piece bitten clean out of his windpipe, toppled to the earth, thrashing with his legs and feet in his death agony.

Red Elk drew himself up painfully, sore in every strained and aching muscle. The fourth Sioux was nowhere to be seen. Discouraged by the turn of events, he had fled in the darkness.

"It is well," said Red Elk. "He may live to go back and tell his people that Earthmaker has given the Iowa teeth!"

It was but the work of a moment or so to find the bodies of the other Sioux and cut off their heads and scalp them. Then Red Elk went down to the river to wash the blood from his face and hands.

"It might serve me as war paint," he

thought, "but I do not like it. Perhaps I am not even yet a man."

That night Red Elk slept on the prairie beside an abandoned buffalo wallow. He made no fire, for one might not tell what warparty might espy it. In the morning he made a meal of corn meal and cold water and took a westerly course, following the bottoms of the draws and the valleys, keeping away from the conspicuous sky lines.

FOR three days Red Elk met with no adventure. He passed the great herds of feeding buffalo, and gave them a wide berth to avoid disturbing the ugly bulls. He went out of his way respectfully for wandering grizzly bears and spoke politely to the big white buffalo wolves, as became a young man in search of adventure. Nobody knows when or by whom he may be pitied when on the warpath lonely, and wolves especially have been known to speak to Indians and render them conspicuous aid in time of peril.

It was about noon on the fourth day that danger overtook Red Elk. He came suddenly around a butte and met the enemy, perhaps a hundred armed warriors, on horseback, painted and plumed for battle. He would have run back into the shelter of the butte, but they saw him as soon as he saw them and in an instant they had him surrounded. He threw down his bundle of clothes and folded his arms. If the time had come that he was to visit the ancestors, he would show these strangers that he could at least die like a man. They crowded closely around him, sitting on their ponies, laughing and talking in a strange language. They were in no hurry to kill him, and Red Elk thought in his heart that they probably were discussing among themselves in what way to have the most amusement out of his passing.

One of their leaders, a short, dark Indian with split buffalo horns on his warbonnet, signaled to him in the sign language,

"Who are you?"

Red Elk answered.

"I am an Iowa, and I am building up my name. I desire to become a man or to die fighting! I am like the sun, and I am a chief's heir! If any one among you is man enough to kill me, he will have done a great thing, something that he may boast about. Behold, I have here the fresh scalps of three Sioux, which I took with my own hands, only lately. My name is Red Elk, the son of No-Heart-of-Fear, and I am ready to die right now!"

There was a buzz of talk among the warriors. Finally one of them said in the sign language:

"We are Comanche, on the warpath. Our old men say that there will be little honor for us all to divide in killing one enemy that we hold in our hands. If you are a man, as you say, pick out any one of us here and fight him in single combat. If you win, we will give you a horse and let you go free. If you lose, he can have the honor of taking your scalp!"

"*Hau! Inneh!*" cried Red Elk aloud, and he signed, "It is good! I will bring four scalps home to my father!"

A Comanche, grinning broadly, rode up before Red Elk, dismounted, and put his Mexican silver-mounted bridle in the Iowa's hand. Another offered him a long lance. Thus armed and equipped, Red Elk mounted and watched the whole hundred men pass by in single file.

"If I choose a young man, they will laugh at me. If I take one of these old hard-faced warriors, he may kill me. It will be harder, but it will be a great thing to boast about when I get home. *Hau!*"

He gave the signal to halt to an elderly man, naked save for breech clout and moccasins, whose great warbonnet with flowing trailers proclaimed him a person of importance.

"*Hau!*" cried the other, reining in. Then he signed:

"You do well, young man, you will give your father a chance to say, 'At least my son was slain by a chief' when he hears the news of your taking off."

"No matter," said Red Elk in his own language, "I believe in my heart that Earthmaker will not allow me to die on the prairie today."

The rest of the Comanche withdrew to a little distance and formed in a solid line with the sun behind them. The chief trotted his horse away for fifty yards and wheeled about, facing the youth, and began to sing his war song. He made a brave figure, but Red Elk, slayer of three Sioux, was not the boy he had been a few days before. He had seen sudden death, he had been through hard fighting, he had felt the hot blood of a dying foeman spurt in his face. All at once he felt in his heart that he was a man. He threw back his head and sang a song of his own, that came to him in that very moment, and that people sing of him now:

"When my name is heard the Dakota tremble!
Weep, Comanche women! Red Elk will slay your men!"

At the same instant Red Elk and the Comanche rapped their heels against their horses' ribs. Hair and feathers flying, they raced toward each other. The old Comanche crouched close to his horse's neck, with his buffalo-hide shield, its painted covers thrown back, protecting his face and chest. Red Elk felt his disadvantage.

"Help me, O Maon the Earthmaker!" he cried.

They came together like a flash. As two eagles swoop to the same quarry they seemed to collide. Red Elk, twisting like a panther, avoided the stab of the Comanche spear, and his own lance, glancing from the tough, curved rawhide of the other's shield, flew glittering to one side. Their horses crashed and Red Elk's girth gave way and he went rolling on the prairie in a cloud of dust. A yell of triumph split the throats of the Comanche. Then Red Elk was on his feet, knife in hand.

The Comanche chief was carried half a hundred feet beyond the point of meeting before he could rein in. Swinging his rearing horse about, he saw the Iowa was dismounted, and, riding over to the line of warriors, he handed both shield and lance to one of his men and sped over the prairie to get his adversary's horse, which he easily caught and brought back, placing the bridle in Red Elk's hand.

"I am a man," he signed. "I give you life to fight again!"

"You say truly that you are a man," signed Red Elk in return. "Red Elk would be glad of your friendship, and hates to kill you!"

The Comanche laughed, and Red Elk, replacing the broken girth that held the saddle blanket—there was no saddle—with another thrown him by a Comanche, leaped on his horse. Instantly, with scalping knife drawn, his adversary was upon him. Nimbly they urged their horses in and out, stabbing, slashing and cutting. The sun glittered on the swift flashing knives as the twain rushed and parried.

Again the Comanche, relying on the heavier weight of his horse, drove it against the animal ridden by the Iowa and almost overthrew it. Red Elk, trying to balance himself, flung out his left hand and the blade of the Comanche swept down upon it, lopping off the two last fingers. Blood spurted, and Red Elk, stung by the sharp pain, slapped his mutilated hand across the face of his enemy. The blood filled the Comanche's eyes, and he raised both hands to dash it away. In that instant Red Elk drew his blade across the other's throat, and with a whistling gasp he fell heavily to the prairie. Red Elk sprang off his horse and stood over the dying man, facing the drawn-up warriors.

"Comanche," he signed, "by your own promise, this man's scalp is mine. But he is a real man, and he brought me back my horse and let me fight again, when he might have slain me. I am no dog, therefore I will let him keep his hair, provided you Comanche will tell your people, and mine also, that I have counted coup upon your chief, that none may call Red Elk a liar!"

Cries of approval went up from the warriors, and a Comanche signed:

"Well done, Red Elk. We Comanche will bear witness as you ask us! Now mount the chief's horse, and leave us quickly! I am chief now, but I can not hold the young men as the dead chief would have. Mount and ride for your life. The three sons and the brother of the dead man will pursue you to have vengeance. More I can not do for you, though promise was given you!"

Even as he spoke four Comanche broke from the line with weapons ready, and as Red Elk sprang on the dead man's horse an arrow cut his ear and hummed past him. Away he galloped, and the warwhoops of the pursuers resounded above the throbbing of his temples.

Over the prairie they raced, the chief's fleet horse gradually widening the gap between Red Elk and his pursuers. On went the chase and, although the miles rolled out behind, the stern demand of blood vengeance kept the well-armed Comanche on his track like wolves. Red Elk felt that if he faltered in his flight, armed with his knife alone, with his wounded hand to handicap him, he would have his body filled as full of arrows as a porcupine is full of quills.

And now his horse began to fail. Before him, not far distant, lay a marshy stream with wooded, bushy banks. If he could win to that he might escape. But the gallant horse stepped in a badger burrow and fell headlong, throwing Red Elk a dozen feet. He was up again quickly and, running back to the struggling horse, he saw that its foreleg was broken. Hastily drawing his knife, the Iowa cut the animal's jugular vein, and ran on.

The Comanche were in plain sight, a mile away. He gained the river bank but left a trail of blood splotches from his dripping hand. Into the water he plunged, then turned and made his way upstream to where a broken beaver dam caught his eye. A pile of logs lay in the water, and under these he crawled, raising his nose for air behind one.

A few moments later the Comanche had reached the shallow stream, and it did not take them long to find the bloody trail's end at the water. Here they stood baffled, talking. At length they dismounted, tied their horses to the willows, and two began to work their way down stream, and two up, watching along the bank for the trail of the fugitive.

As the two who were upstream approached, Red Elk, from his hiding place, saw with satisfaction that they had separated, the younger man pressing on twenty yards ahead of the older, whom Red Elk assumed to be the chief's brother. He allowed the youth to pass him and as the older man likewise went on he rose up suddenly, tripping his adversary, and at the same time clapping his wounded hand over the Comanche's mouth.

So unexpected was his onslaught that the Comanche was in the water behind the dam before he could either defend himself or cry out. With the strength of desperation Red Elk forced the other's head below the water, holding him down with all his strength and weight, until the writhing and struggling of the man was stilled.

It seemed to take a long time, yet it could not have been more than a few minutes before Red Elk was convinced that the Comanche was finished. He scalped the naked body of the warrior and let it drift and roll down stream in the shallow channel. Then he bent his steps in haste, splashing after the other man.

The second searcher paid no attention to Red Elk if he heard him. No doubt he thought that it was his uncle following him, and Red Elk thus drew within arm's reach before he felt for his knife. It was missing! In his last struggle it must have slipped from its sheath, and now lay in the stream bed two hundred yards away.

For an instant Red Elk was at a loss, then, stooping quickly, he snatched up a cobble from the river's bed and brought it crashing down on the Comanche's skull. The other fell face forward without a groan, and as Red Elk jerked away his knife and scalped him with it he heard downstream, the yells of the two Comanche who had just found the body of their slain companion.

But now Red Elk was in better case. The second of his two dead enemies had a bow and quiver full of arrows. In the shallows, these, slung over his back, had not become wet and soaked. Red Elk grinned a wry grin. He had still his war club, which, in all the excitement of battle, he had forgotten completely. Thrust under his belt in the back, it had not yet been lost. He retraced his steps, running hastily through the bushes.

When he was almost back to where he had lain under the logs and killed the first Comanche, he glimpsed the other two returning. Squatting behind a bush, he drove an arrow through the heart of the first as he ran up, before his presence was discovered. The second turned and fled, dashing to the horses in hopes that he might escape with all four, and leave the Iowa afoot.

Red Elk was upon him in a dozen steps, and the Comanche, far less of a man than his father, uncle, or brothers, held out both hands with a whimpering cry for mercy. For a moment Red Elk debated in his heart whether to slay him, then he struck him lightly with his hand and signed:

"Throw down your weapons, and go back to your people! You are not man enough to ride a horse, so walk! Tell them that Red Elk, the Iowa, will hereafter call himself 'Comanche Killer.' By that name he will be known among men in the future!"

As the Comanche trotted eagerly off over the prairie, Red Elk cut loose the horses, and sprang upon the animal that seemed to be the least jaded, driving the others before him. He forded the stream and by nightfall was well on his way back to the village of the Iowa on the Des Moines.

SEVERAL days later Four-Winds-Woman, still sitting mourning on her hillock, was surprized to see Red Elk riding up the trail, driving three horses. She stared at him in astonishment, for he was dirty, bloodstained, and his face was haggard. A strange wild look glinted from his eyes. He seemed a very different person from the elegant young man she had known only a few days before.

"*Hau*, Four-Winds-Woman," he said, "cease your mourning! Behold, three is the number of Sioux that I have slain to avenge your lover. Never again will the Dakota learn to play Iowa flute music. Now mount this horse, and take it as my gift to help you cease your weeping. Ride now to the earth lodge of No-Heart-of-Fear, my father, and tell him to send out an old man to announce that Comanche Killer, who used to be Red Elk, has counted the first coup eight times, cut off two enemy heads, and taken seven scalps! He returns, now, bringing four Comanche horses! His name is heard with fear by the Wahpekutay Sioux and the Comanche! Tell my father to bid the women to prepare for the scalp dance!"

In a short time the Iowa village was in an uproar. The herald had announced not only the news, but praised the generosity of No-Heart-of-Fear, celebrating the triumphant return of his son Comanche Killer by the gift of many horses to the poor and the throwing away to the rabble of much property.

"My father," said Comanche Killer, as he sat beside the proud old chief after his ceremonial return, a day or so later, "you will admit that I am a real man, now?"

"Yes, my son, it makes my heart strong to say so!"

"The people will be glad to receive me as a chief?"

"Yes, my son! Already they are clamoring to have your breast publicly tattooed with the honor-marks of your clan."

"*Hau*. It is good! Then henceforward Comanche Killer may do as he pleases? And no one will dare find fault with him?"

"Yes, it is the custom!"

"Again I say, good! Now, No-Heart-of-Fear, my father, teach me the ways of the clan peace pipes. Teach me all their songs and rites and customs, that I may go out and make peace with the Dakota, the Comanche and all our neighbors! Now that I am proclaimed a real man, I will tell you, my father, that I hate this killing! I think it is too easy to take a man's life, and the sight of blood is disgusting to me! Here after I shall avoid war with my fellow men, and when I want a real battle, I shall do as you did, I shall go out on the prairie and kill some grizzly bears, lone-handed, for their claws to make a chief's necklace! Fighting with human beings is not what I am most fond of!"

"*Hau*, my son! You have spoken well. What would become of the Iowa nation if its chiefs spent all their time in killing? You have learned wisdom as well as courage, and when I go to our ancestors, it will be with satisfaction, and with a heart of joy."

MOUNTAINS of MYSTERY

A Four-Part Story

PART III

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "The King of No Man's Land," "Tiger River," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

ALTHOUGH they had fought side by side in France, found wealth along the upper reaches of the Amazon and traveled in many odd corners of the world, their wanderlust would not let them rest.

So they started out again—Captain Roderick McKay, Lieutenant Meredith Knowlton and Sergeant Tim Ryan—to explore the Venezuelan upcountry in search of the fabled white Indians.

At Ciudad Bolivar they hired as a guide Portonio Mariano a native well acquainted with the Rio Orinoco. And at San Fernando, up the Rio Ventuari, the plotting governor of the district supplied them with two more men to act as pilot and handy man.

While they slept on a playa in midstream, one night, the two San Fernando men stole the motor launch and left the party stranded. They awoke with a start when Portonio shot a jaguar, which had swum the river to attack them. A little later in the day they were rescued by Lucio León, called "Loco" León by the people of Ciudad Bolivar, because of the weird, strange tales he told of the unknown hinterland.

He was a well-to-do trader in balata rubber, and, owing to his fair treatment of the natives, the Maquiritare people were devoted to him. The governor of San Fernando, however, hated him and had sent out some men to "remove" him. They had failed.

The friendship that sprang up between the Latin and the three Northerners was spontaneous. Hearing of their plans Loco León offered to accompany them in search of the white Indians, although he refused to say whether he knew of the existence of these people.

That night the party stopped off at León's *sitio* and a small band of Indians from the Caño Tamara, came to seek information about the three newcomers.

While León talked to the spokesman Tim Ryan went out to look over the other Indians. Just as he was about to move on he asked abruptly:

"How many days to the place of the *blancos puros?*"

"Twenty days," came the unguarded answer.

After dark, when all was quiet, the natives vanished to carry the news of the strangers' coming to the Talking Mountain.

Next day the four white men started upstream in dugout canoes and reached the Equencua Falls, where they disembarked and started on the long portage to the head of the rapids.

THEN on again, up the ever-narrowing river, they fought their way, until they reached the cataract of Oso, the Bear, where they found four Maquiritares, whose skins, instead of being light in color, were black; a dirty, granulated, dingy black.

These men, León explained, were the victims of their wives' jealousy. The latter, fearing to lose their men, had given them the juice of the *sehi* fruit mixed with *yacuta*, or manioc, which had changed the pigmentation of the men's skins.

Farther up the river, in the dead of night, a man's voice rang out—the voice of a man who had once been civilized, the voice of an American! White was the madman's name. He had married a native woman and she had given him of the *sehi* to drink. The change in his appearance had made him mad, and he would allow no white men to see him. He vanished when León spoke quietly to him.

After losing a boatman at one of the cataracts, the party reached Uaunana, where they were met by the Maquiritare chief, Juacinto. Reluctantly he agreed to lend León two guides to go up the Periquita, the river of demons, which led to the home of the *blondos*.

Six of León's men deserted when they heard the news, and only nine men set forth on the fateful journey: The four white men, the ever-faithful Portonio, and four natives.

For six days all went well, then in the night, without sound, the demons struck. The four natives were spirited away without sound or sign of struggle, leaving behind their weapons and belongings. They vanished, and the canoe with them.

When dawn came León found a blowgun dart fastened to the trunk of a tree. And the dart was pointing down a barely discernible track.

"A token and a guide," said León.

"Token of what?" puzzled McKay. "Death?"

"Cap, it's a traffic sign!" broke in Tim. "It heads west."

"Good," said McKay. "Let's go."

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CHAPTER XV

GHOST LAND

ALONG an elusive thread of a trail, through tall forest which still shook down chill drops of moisture as the breezes swept its crown, marched the five remaining from the fourteen who had left the Caño Negro.

Once more the guidance of their course had swung to the lot of the Spanish-born; for, though neither of the Venezuelans was acquainted with the terrane now to be traversed, each of them was a veteran of similar *selvas*, and thus a shade more at home here than the outlanders. As McKay had put it:

"You chaps have the feel of this region. We haven't. So you pick the way for awhile."

And now León and Portonio walked in file at the head of the short column.

On each man's back hung a small pack; the meagre possessions remaining from the outfit carried by the canoe. The Americans, who habitually brought their rucksacks ashore at night, carried them now, with various small belongings therein. Portonio and León portaged the hammocks, tightly rolled and hitched on by bark thongs. Under each Venezuelan's left arm hung his bullet bag, and in either fist swung rifle and machete.

The Americans carried their ammunition in army web belts, heavy laden; their machetes—or, rather, those of the Indians who had failed to use them—thrust under those same belts, unguarded by any scabbards; their rifles in their right hands, and pistols swinging at their thighs. The hammocks, bows, and arrows of the Maquiritares had been left behind, stowed out of sight on an overhead shelf formed by a few small poles laid crosswise of the hut.

"We cannot use them," León had pointed out, "and it may be that the Indios will reappear here at some time in desperate need of them. I cannot feel that they have left us because they wished to do so; not Frasco, at any rate. If they still live they will return here—sometime. We shall take the machetes."

Before starting, they had taken careful stock of their cartridge supply, finding that it totaled about four hundred rounds. The .30's and .45's of the Americans aggregated about three hundred, while the .44's of the Spaniards, who carried no revolvers, came to approximately a hundred.

"Enough to carry us a long distance," asserted Knowlton, "unless we get into a jam with a hostile gang or two. A stiff scrap would eat up these yellow babies in jig-time. Moral: Don't start anything."

And now they were on the march, following the direction indicated by that strange red-and-black pointer on the tree. What lay before them none could guess, but each of the Northerners walked in half hope of meeting at last some member of that blond race for which they had sought so unswervingly.

With a pang Knowlton thought of the camera and films, now lost, which could have recorded in indisputable form the existence of such a people, if actually it did exist. He had left the machine under the tarpaulin last night, and now it was forever gone. Gone, too, were all snapshots taken along the route above Monoblanco—snatched away as if grim old Guayana were determined to let no views of her secret places go forth to the world of white men.

So dimly marked was the path beneath their feet that they could advance only at a slow pace, constantly watchful against its total evanishment. It was damp, yet hard; nowhere on it could be discerned the recent mark of a human foot. It veered and wound as if aimless, yet steadily led on to the westward.

At no point was affixed any dart similar to the one which had first directed them, and which still led them—for León, in whimsical jest, had stabbed the cryptic token through the peak of his sombrero, and there it rode at the head of the party, its black tip foremost and its sanguinary butt cockily protruding behind.

For more than two hours they trudged on, feeling all the time that the ground was gradually rising. No living thing, alow or aloft, moved or called. The forest seemed intensely quiet; and so shadowy was it that over the marchers crept the feeling that they were traversing a ghostland, wherein dwelt no live man or beast or bird. When they spoke, which was seldom, they unconsciously hushed their tones. At length the ascending grade became more steep, and for another half hour they climbed at an angle which taxed legs and lungs. Then the light grew rapidly stronger; the trees thinned out; and beyond the branches became visible spaces of low sky.

"*Sabana!*" called León, quickening his pace. Portonio, chuckling at this vindication of his judgment, pressed after him. Then, abruptly, both slowed.

"*Caramba!* What is this?" ejaculated the leader.

The open savanna now was plainly visible through the trees, and there the forest trail must end. Here, at the terminus of that path, a grotesque shape hung from an overhead branch; a black, somber thing, dangling by a length of stout vine, and still with the absolute stillness of death. It resembled a bird—but monstrous and misshapen.

Approaching gingerly, they stared at it; then, at closer range, chuckled in relief, even while they shot mystified glances about them. The weird thing was a pair of *paují* turkeys, hanging by the necks from the same loop, so that they had appeared to be one creature bloated beyond recognition. A tentative sniff, followed by a practiced handling by both the Venezuelans, disclosed the fact that the birds were freshly killed.

"Wha'd'ye know!" marveled Tim. "A hand-out from the spooks!"

They stared around them again. No peering face, no flitting form, met their gaze. A long sigh of wind overhead accentuated the loneliness of the place. Once more they eyed the birds.

McKay's mouth tightened.

"Looks too much like the bait in a trap to suit me," he crisply declared. And he strode away toward the open land.

The others after a moment's hesitation, followed him. But during that moment Portonio swung his machete, severing the cord, and slung both birds over one shoulder. With them wobbling down his back, he proceeded. A score more of long strides brought all to the savanna.

THERE, after a quick, sweeping survey, all turned their eyes southward. They had emerged at a point of woods which thrust into the savanna like a short promontory into a small sea. To the right the forest edge curved away, then swung back westward again, running away across rolling hillocks into the distance. Straight ahead stretched an undulating expanse of scattered, stunted trees hardly taller than a man.

But at the south rose a bulk which caught and held every eye; a huge rampart of rock, massive and grim; an unknown mountain of an unknown land, scowling down at these atoms of humanity who had just crept out into its ken. Flat-topped, ugly, brutal, its stark seams clearly visible through the thin heat-haze, it glowered like the gigantic forebear of the fabled headless warriors of the Caura—hulking creatures with malignant eyes in their chests. And the five men confronting it, who had faced and fought many a ferocious thing in other days, unconsciously set their jaws and gave it back scowl for scowl.

Presently, however, they recalled their attention to their nearer surroundings. There was nothing to see but the gravelly savanna and its dwarf trees, but these were weird: Some thick-trunked, yet crowned only by a few miserable stubs of branches; others warped, gnarled, contorted like tortured gnomes twisted out of all semblance to human form. One might fancy that they were ghastly wrecks of once healthy beings, fiendishly crippled by brutalities inflicted by that monster at the south, then doomed to stand here forever while the giant gloated on their misery.

"Cripes!" muttered Tim. "This is a —— of a place!"

It truly was: A desolate inferno of diabolical shapes, grilling under the heat of a molten ball high overhead. The next moment the speaker made a discovery which did not tend to lighten his spirits. His glance happened to linger on the nearest dwarfed trunk, and there he spied a spot of red.

"Lookit!" he pointed. "There's the ——'s traffic sign again!"

Knowlton squinted at the tree, then walked over to it.

"True enough," he announced. "It's another of those red-and-black darts. Points straight to that mountain. Well, we owe the highway department hereabouts a vote of thanks, fellows. Route markers, free air, turkey dinners gratis."

After narrowly inspecting the missile and finding no poison on the point, he plucked it from its binding vine and slid it under the cloth button crowning his topi.

"Yeah," rumbled Tim. "But before I eat any o' that turk I want to know is it poisoned. These here blowgun needles sort o' take away me appetite."

Knowlton's lids narrowed, and so did McKay's, as they eyed the two fine birds on Portonio's shoulder. As Tim suggested, those curassows probably had been slain by darts dipped in the deadly curare; and although they knew that weird venom to be innocuous to the stomach, the thought of devouring the flesh of poisoned creatures was unattractive. But León calmly pointed out:

"There is nothing else to eat, *amigos*. So let us not quarrel with what the gods provide."

"Any gods that feed me poison ain't the kind I'll say me prayers to," the Irishman retorted. "And I don't sink me teeth in no snake-bit free lunch."

León made no answer. With a gesture to Portonio, he stepped back into the forest shade and began hacking a dead branch into firewood. The riverman followed, leaned his gun against a tree, and rapidly plucked the birds. Obviously neither of the South Americans felt any qualms against eating the meat—even after it became evident that Tim's surmise was correct. Each naked body showed a telltale tiny wound surrounded by a small bluish blotch.

"I have eaten such meat many a time, señores," assured León, as he kindled the fire. "The poison can do no harm unless you have a cut in the mouth, or a hollow tooth, or some such way for it to reach your blood. If you prefer to walk with only wind in your stomachs, do so. I shall eat all I can."

And, when Portonio had deftly dressed and quartered the birds, the Ventuari man went to broiling his share on a forked stick. One by one the Northerners squatted and did the same—even Tim. So intent were they on the cooking that they did not notice the departure of Portonio, who, after a long look around, quietly took the camp kettle from his pack and, rifle in hand, walked away into the woods. By the time they discovered his absence and started up in anxiety to look for him, he was emerging again from the obscurity, carrying the kettle as carefully as if it held eggs.

"*Agua*, señores," he grinned. "Water—a little. I found water vines and squeezed them. There is no other." He showed a small quantity of water in his kettle, enough for a few swallows each.

McKay's lips opened to reprimand him for departing alone, but he bit back the reproof; for it occurred to him that he himself had set a bad example that morning by starting alone to the *raudal*. The big riverman, however, read his frown, and, with a cheerful grin, added:

"Nobody is here. The ghosts walk only at night."

"True for ye, feller," agreed Tim. "The only bad crack that's come in daylight was Curro gittin' killed in that there rowdy-dow, or what ye call it—*raudal?* All right—and that was accidental. Night's the time when we've got to watch ourselves."

"I don't believe we've got to watch ourselves at all," declared Knowlton, an odd light in his eyes. "I've been doping on this thing while we marched, and I believe we're in right. Certainly everything indicates it. We weren't touched last night. We find guide-posts along the way. We even have our grub hung up and waiting for us. A queer way for these spooks to act if they don't want us in here!

"I believe this white crowd in here has made this section taboo for Indians; but real white men, like us, can come right in. They've heard about us and they want us to come on. That blond chap who came to Uaunana gave Juancito orders to help us along. That's why the old boy did a mental back-flip after refusing to give us a hand. They watched us come up the Periqueta; remember the mysterious movements we used to see? And they were around our camps. They're at the bottom of last night's doings—although I can't imagine why or how they pulled off that stunt. And they're helping us along now."

"Mebbe. But what for?" demanded Tim. "If they're so chummy why don't they come out and lay down a door-mat with 'Welcome' on it? We're knockin' on the door now."

"Because they're wary. We're the first whites who ever came in here. We're packing guns. They're shy. By and by they'll come out in the open and be friendly. They're friendly now, but too uncertain of us to take chances."

He drew back his roasting-stick, inspected his meat, and held it aside to cool. León, already chewing at his own tough portion, munched meditatively, then slowly nodded.

"You may have it right, señor," he conceded. "It sounds probable. They know of our coming, beyond a doubt. Señor Tim spoke to the men of the Caño Tamara at my *sitio*, he has told me. That Caño Tamara is to the west of here, and those men must have come back to give the word. And Black White, at Monoblanco, heard our plans. He must know these people. He may have told them. But yet——"

He paused, frowning, and took another bite. Knowlton tore off a tentative mouthful and fell to masticating it.

"Yet what?" queried McKay.

"He came to warn us, Capitán. There is between him and me a queer sort of friendship; that is to say, we would help each other in time of need, if we could; and, in his crazy way, he was trying to help me then. And you remember what he said."

"Yeah. Said these gorillas would claw the faces offen us." Tim twitched his heavy shoulders as if chilled by the memory. "I think we're a bunch o' come-ons. They're kiddin' us along till they git us to the right place, and then——"

"And then what'll *we* do?" challenged Knowlton. "Lie down and let 'em claw? Not with four hundred rounds and five machetes and ten fists and feet among us. As for Black White's yap, it amounts to about as much as the yelps of a cuckoo-clock. Come on, eat your poison and let's go. Mine tastes good."

With which he crushed another mouthful of turkey-breast between his teeth. McKay, his jaws working with the regularity of machinery, was chewing away with no visible interest in the theories propounded. The red man, who had been cooking his meat almost to a crisp, as if thereby he could neutralize the curare in its tissues, scowled at it, drew his face into a knot, and began to gnaw. Its unsalted flavor was unappetizing, but, once started, he ground away without a word.

Presently Knowlton, with a wink at León, said soberly to McKay:

"Maybe Tim's right, though, Rod. Perhaps we'd better hit straight west and try to get out of here. We can find some creek and get back to the Ventuari."

"Huh?" Tim bristled. "Quit? Ye poor fish——"

Then he spied the twinkle in the blue eyes and caught his tongue.

"Hark to the Great American Doughboy," laughed Knowlton. "We had about a million like him in the army, León. Growl and grouch about going ahead—but try to turn 'em back and they'd knock your face in."

"Grrrumph!" growled Tim, gnawing again. León snickered.

WHEN the birds were reduced to bones they emptied the kettle of its water—a careful ration to each man, until it was gone. It was not enough to sate their thirst, but it had to suffice. Then, settling hats more firmly on heads and picking up packs and arms, they tramped out into the blazing savanna. There they turned to the left and began their dogged march toward the brute of a mountain.

Now, with open land about them and that towering landmark ahead, they journeyed in a different formation; instead of a file, they made a straggling skirmish line, each man walking as he pleased, yet keeping approximately abreast of the others. No orders were given; they adopted this line of march instinctively, as giving them a wider range of view.

Up over the crest of a low rolling ridge they trudged, and down its easy slant beyond; along the sides of a bumpy boil of gravel, passing around it on right and left and drawing together again; converging on a higher bump farther along, clustering on its summit for a brief survey in all directions, then scattering below. As they went, the forest at their left kept gradually receding, leaving them farther and farther out in the land of the ghost-trees.

Hour by hour they walked, meeting only the same weird dwarf growth, the same uneven swells and troughs of land. And, hour by hour, the giant ahead remained where it was, approaching no nearer for all their steady tramping. At length Knowlton called to León:

"How far off is that miserable rock, anyway? We can't reach it by night, can we?"

"Hardly, señor," the rover answered, repressing a smile. "Perhaps three days—perhaps four."

"Sufferin' camels!" croaked Tim. "And no water!"

Yet water did come. Late in the afternoon, when the thirsty band gathered once more on a hill-top to seek sign of the moisture which their sun-parched bodies now fiercely demanded, a sizable cluster of tall green palms caught their eyes.

"Un morichal!" rasped Portonio. *"Agua! Carne!"*

"A water-hole where grows the moriche-palm. Water and meat," echoed León. "At such spots gather animals to drink at sunset."

They swung into a jog trot. In less than half an hour they were almost at the edge of the oasis. And there they met their meat—alive and coming to them.

From the greenery sprang a tawny creature, dashing toward them as if pressed hard by pursuers. Abruptly it halted, staring at the oncoming men; then swerved as if to flee westward. Three rifles spoke almost as one. The quarry pitched headlong and was still. Running to it, the marchers gloated down at a beautiful dwarf deer.

"Supper and breakfast!" exulted Tim. "And now for about forty gallons o' that wet water!"

He began trotting toward the trees.

"As you were!" barked McKay. "Something drove that deer out. Watch yourself!"

The band closed in. Guardedly they advanced, reached the trees, walked to the water. No man or animal opposed them; no sight or sound of lurking life came to them. Two by two they sank and drank, rose, stood on guard while the others imbibed the precious liquid and bathed their hot heads. Yet there seemed absolutely nothing to guard against.

Portonio strode forth, heaved the deer to his shoulders, brought it in. While he cut it up, the rest built a makeshift camp. A fire bloomed, and the odor of broiling venison tantalized their nostrils.

All were too tired for talk. But, as the sun touched the horizon, throwing a queer pinkish light over the wilderness of ghost-trees, the seldom-speaking Portonio voiced something which still puzzled all. In his river Spanish he drawled:

"I wonder what thing drove that animal to us."

Then from somewhere sounded a strange noise as if invisible demons laughed; an eerie chuckle that made the hair stir and hands reach for guns. It died, and came no more. The men looked at one another speechlessly. The hissing of the flames was the only sound in the darkening morichal.

The sun vanished. The stars sprang out. The stunted trees became black monstrosities leering at the camp. Once more, under his breath, Tim muttered:

"This is a —— of a place!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE TALKING MOUNTAIN

THROUGHOUT that night every man lay with his rifle tied to his arm. And throughout the sunless hours the fire was kept burning.

The fact that the guns had been undisturbed in the ghostly raid at the Periqueta did not, as McKay pointed out, prove that no attempt to take them would be made at this or some future camp. The invisible, inaudible demons who had spirited away four Indians and a canoe might again steal into the sleeping quarters, this time to sneak away the weapons. Wherefore the Northerners extracted from their knee-boots the rawhide thongs and knotted them to the rifles and to their left wrists, holding the weapons in inescapable leash while leaving their right hands free. Then they took the guns to bed with them. Even a demon would find extreme difficulty in abstracting those firearms without arousing their owners.

As for the fire, it was replenished from time to time by whoever happened to awake. No watch was kept, or even considered; for sleep was too badly needed. Yet nobody, except, possibly, Portonio, slumbered steadily through the dark hours. At different times each roused, looked about and listened, and presently lapsed back into unconsciousness. At no time was any figure, human or otherwise, seen in the vague light cast by the smouldering flame. Nor did any tug come at any of the rifle-thongs.

Once, and once only, came a noise which made those who heard it sit up and swing their guns out of the hammocks. Somewhere in the gloomy depths beyond the little pool sounded a sudden rush, a gasping, struggling commotion, and then a low, ferocious growl. Followed a vague sound suggestive of powerful jaws rending a bloody repast. Silence ensued. The listeners lay back. It was merely one of the nocturnal tragedies of the drinking hole. Some animal had torn the life from another.

Dawn found them astir; untying their guns, relacing boots, freshening the fire, drinking and bathing at the pool. The broiled remnants of the deer—hung high above the fire, that no prowling animal might snatch them in the night—were taken down and eaten. The last rites of breaking camp were another long drink and a futile attempt to devise some means of carrying water unspilled in the lidless kettle, the only vessel available. Had plantain leaves been at hand, a passable cover might have been constructed and lashed on; but there were none.

"This is one time when we traveled too light," complained Tim. "If we'd only brought along that empty coffee-can and the coffee-pot, instead o' leavin' 'em because we didn't have no more coffee——"

"And if we'd sat awake all night and prevented our canoe from giving us the slip—" ridiculed Knowlton. "What's the good of 'if'? We'll find some more water when we need it. The spooks are taking good care of us."

"Yeah. Same as a farmer takes good care o' the turk jest before Thanksgivin'."

"Crape-hanger! Come on, let's go."

They went. Out among the ghost-trees they marched, and, circuiting the *morichal*, on toward the mountain.

As before, they walked in a loose-flung skirmish line which expanded or contracted in conformity with the ground surface. And, as before, the terrane varied yard by yard, remaining constant only in two particulars—the presence of the malformed trees and the absence of water. Not even the bottoms of the occasional ravines showed any trace of moisture.

Toward noon, however, Knowlton's faith in the beneficence of the "spooks" justified itself. Another clump of the water-loving moriche-palms thrust their plumes above the stunted growth, and, on reaching it, the trampers discovered another "hand-out."

At the edge of the small central pool stood a slender but long pole, shoved deep into the wet soil and slanting outward; and at its top, hanging high above the water and thus inaccessible to any leaping jaguar or other beast of prey, swung a cluster of four agoutis—rabbit-like animals whose succulent flesh formed a welcome change from the dry meats hitherto eaten.

"Better and better!" exulted Knowlton. "Next thing we know, we'll find our camps all built for us when we arrive, and grub cooked and smoking hot on a table. Rod, doesn't it remind you of the fairy tales we used to hear when we were kids? An enchanted land with invisible people, and everything furnished just when it was needed, and so on. Maybe we'll find a sleeping beauty in a marble hall waiting for Tim to kiss her back to life."

"Huh! She's out o' luck, then," grunted Tim, dipping for a drink. "I only kiss live ones. No dopes for me."

While Portonio went about preparing the meal, the rest searched the little oasis thoroughly for signs of their benefactors. They found absolutely none. Not even a human footmark was visible. The ground was too firm to hold any tracks except at the very edge, and there showed only the depressions made by animals and birds. When they were again resting beside the camp-fire, León said:

"The *demonios* are indeed taking good care of us. These little animals never lived at this place. They were killed this morning somewhere over in the forest, at some spot where a stream runs, and brought all this distance to await us."

The forest edge at the east now was nearly a mile away; and any stream therein must be considerably farther off. In all, several miles must have been traveled by the bearers of that sweet meat.

As they swung on through the afternoon glare, the five kept an even closer watch on the swells and folds of land; for again the feeling was strong upon them that they were being escorted by others who kept constant track of their march. But never could they detect any head watching behind tree or over hill-crest, or any form moving on the sky-line or along the hollows. Around lay only empty wilderness; ahead loomed the stark mountain; above rolled the burning sun in a blank sky; and that was all.

SUNDOWN drew nigh. The rock wall now was loftier, nearer, yet all too far away. And the water hole which all had grown to expect did not appear. More and more anxiously they climbed each succeeding knoll, squinted with bloodshot eyes through the bluish haze, bit their dry tongues, and, wordless, toiled on to the next elevation. Nowhere could they find the green crowns of the slim moriche to beckon them on. At length León pointed eastward. The others nodded. The weary band began to labor in the direction of the distant forest, where, perhaps, some water-vines or other moisture might be found. The invisible guides and providers seemed to have failed them at last.

But then came a sound. From the direction of the mountain, in their previous line of march, floated weird voices.

"Ah-ho-o-o! Ah-ho-o-o-o-o!"

Long-drawn, blending in a mellow yet eerie chorus, the hails sang across the waste land with the resonance of softly chiming bells—not loud, yet clear of tone. On the ears of the men who for many hours had heard only the empty flutterings of parched leaves and the slither of their own feet, they fell like muted trumpet-calls. They halted short, gaping southward.

"Ah-ho-o-o! Ah-ho-o-o-o!"

"*Ajo!*" echoed León, his tones rasping in his dried-up throat. "What is that?"

As one man, they right-faced and pushed southward again. On the crest of another knoll they stopped and peered toward the point whence seemed to rise those calls. And then the voices died out.

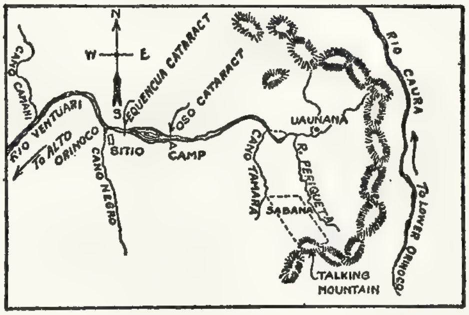
While they still strained eyes and ears, from among the dwarfs began to rise a dark, shapeless form, like a jinnee conjured up by some magician to perform the tasks of men. Wavering, then leaning off to the westward and fading out as the breeze sifted its upper portions into nothingness, still it held its foot fixed in the same spot; a gray-black spirit of smoke, marking the place toward which the wilderness wayfarers should hold their course.

That place was less than half a mile away. And without question or argument the five forthwith struck off through the stumpy growth, heading toward the beacon with resolute strides. No more calls came to them; nor did they themselves voice any shouts. They had no breath to waste.

While they advanced, the jinnee grew thinner, sank lower, as if slowly withdrawing into some subterranean cavern, to vanish when these mortals should reach the spot whence it issued. When they did arrive there, it had sunk to nothing. But its lair was unmistakable; a fantastic rock, shelving outward at one side and forming a crude, columnless portico.

Beneath that queer roof lay the earthly vestiges of the signaling spirit—a few coals and the blackened débris of handfuls of green leaves. There, too, waited the essentials of life for the men who had obeyed its summons. On the ground lay five monkeys; a small, jet black *mono viudita,* two larger tan-colored *monoblancos,* and two huge red *areguatos.* And near at hand stood three sizable clay jars, full of water.

As ever, no human being was there. For a few minutes, reveling in the refreshment of the life-giving liquid, the adventurers gave hardly more than a glance to the surroundings. Then they scouted briefly around the rock—and in vain. Finally Tim hurled a roaring bawl out across the stillness.



"Yah ho-o-o-o! Wah ho-o-o-o!"

Half a minute crawled away before any reply sounded. Then, faint yet clear, seemingly far off yet curiously near, back floated the ghost voices.

"Ah-ho-o-o-o!"

Once only came that strange harmony of tones. Then—only the tiny sigh of drooping leaves on starveling branches, swept by hot wind. The bloated red sun slid below the horizon. A furnace glare flamed on a few skinny clouds, died to pink, faded out. Night strode over the waste.

Again the five slept on their arms. This time they hung no hammocks, but lay on the ground, protected from any chance rain by the outcrop of stone. No rain came, though, and for once the night sky remained clear, a lopsided moon flooding the wilderness with silvery radiance. If any creature came near the camp in the night it stole away again undetected, leaving behind it no trace of its presence.

Dawn had not yet come when Portonio was up and rebuilding the fire. By sunrise every man had worried down his share of the monkey-meat, and the jars had been drained of their water. In the first rays of the new sun they clustered upon the rock which had sheltered them, studying the huge block at the southward which, all felt, marked the final goal of their march. Massive and menacing, it now seemed to hang almost over them, biding its time to topple forward and crush to nothingness the puny human insects who dared approach its base. Yet it still was miles away.

"We should reach it this afternoon," judged León, "unless our demon friends fail us now and make us hunt for our food. And that does not seem likely. It seems that they wish us to reach them as soon as we can."

"About time for them to take visible form, if they're going to," said McKay. "Unless we see something human soon I shall be getting superstitious."

His face relaxed as he spoke, but his words were only half a jest. The uncanny attendance of unseen beings, the bodiless voices heard at sundown, the unnatural trees, the mute yet palpable threat of the stone giant ever before them—these things, combined with the soul-searing sun and the unbalanced diet and infrequent allaying of thirst, had drawn taut even his iron nerves. The pinched faces and restless eyes of his comrades betrayed a strain worse than his own. If only something, anything—even a horde of murderous savages—would take shape and move!

"Well, they were within shouting distance last night," recalled Knowlton. "Today we ought to come into sight of them."

"Within shouting distance," echoed León. "Yet not within shooting distance. I have been thinking that perhaps that deer which we shot was driven out to make us show what we could do with our guns; and we did a little too well. But they are slowly drawing a little nearer, as you say. *Bien.* Let us walk to them."

They tramped away.

Midday found them toiling up a gradual ascent, lifting toward the mountain. The trees were becoming somewhat more dense, and the small hills which had afforded occasional elevated views seemed to have ended, giving way to a sloping plain whereon nothing could be made out save the nearer trunks. Again their dried-out bodies cried for water; but no water was in sight. The mountain wall, however, seemed now to stand almost within gunshot. Toward it they plodded; on and up, step by step, yard by yard, rod by rod, climbing that tilted surface which must lead at last to the cliff.

ALL at once the land fell away. Before they were aware of it, they stood on the rolling verge of a steep down-grade, at the bottom of which stretched a long valley green with trees; no starveling dwarf trees, but tall, full-bodied growths betokening the presence of water. On the farther side, that green mantle seemed almost to meet the base of the towering precipice itself. One swift, sweeping survey they took, seeking huts, plantations, smokes, moving figures—any signs of man. Not one did they find.

Portonio, a little distance from the others, swallowed, pointed to the trees, and hoarsely called—

"*Agua!*"

Without reply, his companions pressed forward, licking their cracked lips with sticky tongues. Then all halted as if shot. From across the valley a hoarse voice croaked—

"*Agua!*"

It was a loud voice; louder than Portonio's, yet strangely like it; withal, a harder, stonier tone, as if the stark cliff itself spoke. Staring, the men searched all along the line for the source of that startling answer. Nothing showed.

Tim, clearing his parched throat, demanded:

"Grrup! What the ——'s that?"

Seconds passed. Then, abrupt as a blow, something bellowed:

"*Grrup! What the ——'s that?*"

After a stunned instant, the five broke into wild laughter as the explanation struck them. Their mirth was brief and harsh, but a relief from the sudden nerve tension. When the echo hurtled back at them, however, they scowled and ceased grinning. As before, the noise was startlingly loud; every tone was magnified; and the wild peals, with that stony harshness behind them, seemed horrible as the roars of exultant fiends.

Indeed, for the moment it was hard to realize that the monstrous rock was not voicing its own savage delight at having lured the legend-hunters into its clutch, to break and twist them into such haggard cripples as those distorted growths among which they had marched so long.

It was too much for Tim. Fiercely he yelled back at the mocking voices:

"Shut up, —— ye!"

To which the malignant rock retorted with thundering ferocity:

"*Shut up, —— ye!*"

Tim gulped and glared, his eyes snapping. Knowlton chuckled dryly and adjured him:

"Come on. You're crazy."

With that he and the others resumed their movements. Within three steps they heard a low, hideous chortle from the giant, and the satiric invitation:

"*Come on! You're crazy!*"

Tim clamped his lips tight. But, as he swung on down the slope, he told himself:

"Begorry, that ain't no lie, neither. Everything's crazy round here, and we're crazy to ever come here."

They had nearly reached the timber when, from a point some distance to the westward came a long shout.

"Ah-h-c-o-o-o-o!"

The mountain promptly repeated it, but failed to confuse the listening men. Again and again it rang from the west and rebounded from the wall. After looking at one another, they shook their heads and marched on, straight into the forest. Water must be nearer than the place where those calls rose; and water they must have. All else could wait.

León and Portonio, with machetes swinging, led the way through the tangle, holding their course true toward the now unseen wall. But no water could they discover. They crossed the depression, found the ground rising again, and turned back; scouted a little way up and down the bottom of the hollow; and failed to detect so much as a drop of moisture.

The soil was rather soft, but nowhere wet. It became evident to all that whatever water nourished the luxuriant tree-growth was below the surface; and they had neither the tools nor the inclination to dig for it. Abandoning the search, they squatted for a time in the shade, finding a partial relief in rest and refuge from the grilling sun. No voices came to them now. The calls at the west had died out soon after they entered the woods.

"I think we have strayed," said León, speaking low, "and have missed some sign left for us. The people of this place look for us where they were calling. No doubt we shall find food and drink there, or be led to where those things wait."

For a moment all held their breath, awaiting the echo. None came. The thick growth, apparently, so deadened the Spaniard's quiet words as to prevent any reverberation.

"Well, let's go and see what the bill of fare is," prompted McKay. "I'm hungry."

"Me too!" loudly affirmed Tim—too loudly; for, as they began to back-track, the sinister wall behind them responded in a muffled tone—

"*Me, too!*"

Once more in the open, they paused, looking for any figures moving about in search of them. Instead, over at the west had risen another spirit of smoke, which stood up and waveringly summoned them to—what? The long-expected meeting with the white men of Guayana? They swung forward to find out.

Unlike the jinnee of the desert rock, this phantom did not withdraw into the ground as they approached. It did, however, grow thinner, paling from black to gray, as if the fresh leaves on which its fire fed were becoming exhausted. And when the rovers reached it they found only flames and charred foliage. There was no food. Nor were any men——

"*Mira!* Look!" exclaimed Portonio, pointing.

In advancing toward the signal they had obliqued upward to a point above the tree-tops. Now they looked across at the wall, and found there something not visible from their previous viewpoint. In the stark rock was a shallow fold; and in that depression showed a black hole—a cavern mouth. But it was not that cavity which held the gaze of the wanderers. Before the opening stood rocks, and on the tallest was a human figure. Voiceless, it was moving its arms slowly up and down.

As the riverman's ejaculation bounded back across the little gulf, León added another.

"A woman!"

Whether his assertion was a certainty based on his keen sight, or merely a guess, the others could not tell; for, though the figure seemed nude, their heat-fatigued vision could not distinguish feminine contours at that distance. The one thing plain to all was that the signaler was alive and, as seen against the dusky cavern, white. Now, as the second echo resounded, the waving arms moved overhead and beckoned.

"Ah-ho-o-o!" called León. "*Amigos!*"

As ever, the stony mimicry returned. But then followed a voice more strange, more weird. From the cave behind the silent figure rolled a deep, hollow, sepulchral tone, totally unlike the resonant reverberations from the outer wall.

"Loco León! *Blancos! Aquí!*—White men! Come here!"

The giant, tiring of empty mockery, had spoken of its own accord.

CHAPTER XVII

OUT OF THE STORM

THE white figure beckoning from the rock let its arms droop. For a moment it stood motionless. Then it stooped and sank from view, and the watchers saw only that cavernous mouth which had commanded them to come to it.

Presently they relaxed and let their gaze rove once more along the wall. No other opening was visible anywhere; nothing but the seams and ribs of the sheer block, rising for thousands of feet straight into the sky. As their eyes traveled toward the eastern extremity of the huge bulwark, something else caught and held their attention: A black, ominous shape rising out of the distant masses of jungle. Rapidly it mounted into the sky, becoming a colossus which strode in league-long paces across the earth, mighty and malevolent.

"Irresistible force," quoth McKay, "about to collide with an immovable body, There'll be a smash. Let's go."

"Must be a path through the woods here." judged Knowlton. "Otherwise the signal-fire wouldn't have been placed here. Come on!"

Amid the echoes they jogged down the slope, searching the forest edge for some opening. Portonio found it first—a narrow slot through the verdure, following a zigzag but well-trodden path. Along this they trotted. Presently the ground began to rise again, becoming more and more steep. The forest thinned, but the light grew all the more dim; the looming colossus now had reached forward and snatched the sun from the sky. Somewhere at the east broke out a booming report of thunder, hard as a cannon shot. The men spurted into a run.

Panting, they debouched into clear ground, where the path still lay plain before them, scaling the last stiff slope to the rocks whereon that signaling form had stood. It ran now up a deep ravine, devoid of bush, which led straight to the opening in the mountain. From their present low angle of vision the cave mouth was invisible, masked by its guardian stones; and only the blank face of the precipice soared into the upper distance, enwrapped now by the inky body of the storm spirit.

From that black demon now darted a dazzling flash, followed instantly by a stunning detonation. Deafened, half blinded, the five threw every energy into reaching shelter before a drowning deluge should roar down on them. The irresistible force was already in combat with the immovable body. Amid such cataclysmic conflict as now was breaking, no mere mortal could hope to stand.

Between two tall stones the track led by short, sharp twists. Then the mouth of the cave seemed to snap open before them—a gaping maw of gloom. The laboring five slowed to a halt, stabbing that murk with rapid glances which revealed no human form. As they stood there, overhead burst a terrific crash. They leaped forward again. Into the yawning gap they plunged in a compact body. As the rock roof slid out above them, at their backs sounded a solid slap of rain. Everything vanished in a roaring smother of water.

"Begorry, here's a drink, anyways!" yelled Tim. "Tonio! *La caldera!* The kettle!"

Portonio, with another look around, swiftly divested himself not only of his pack, but of his clothing. Smiling, he ducked forth into the cataract of rain; set down the kettle, and, throwing his arms over his head, stood a minute reveling in the deluge, though staggering under its impact. The sight was too much for the rest. As he came scrambling back in, gasping but grinning, he found his señores peeling their garments.

Two by two, while the others maintained vigilance, they jumped out into the elemental chaos; stood as long as they could, while every heat-expanded pore of their bodies sucked up the flailing drops; and bounded back, reinvigorated as by a plunge into an icy pool. Tim, last to return, brought in the kettle, now nearly half full. It afforded only a few swallows to each man, but between these and the absorption from their impromptu bath the tormenting thirst seemed magically appeased.

As they rapidly dressed again, the fury of the assaulting cloud giant became a paroxysm. The deluge was shot athwart by blinding glares of lightning; the rain-roar overwhelmed by stunning shocks of thunder. Flash upon flash, crash upon crash, flared and pounded earth and rock and air in frightful fulminations.

So violent were the concussions that, though partly protected from the full force of the abysmal attack, the men within the cave-mouth found their sensibilities growing numb. Almost without conscious impulse they drifted back from it, moving farther and farther in, peering about them with lids nearly closed as a defense against the searing bursts of light.

THE flickering flares revealed only an empty gap in the stone, receding into unbroken gloom. No human figure was there. But for the evidence of the path, the adventurers might well believe that all beings in this land were unearthly. Voices and smokes, and one view of a distant human form which soon had faded into nothing—these had been all their guides. And now they became again aware of a voice, stealing from that darksome region beyond. At another time, when the outer world was at peace, that tone might have been sonorous. Now, amid the thundering tumult, it seemed a mere whisper.

"*Aquí! Adentro!*" it urged. "Come here! Come in!"

All faced toward the inner recesses, but none advanced. They had followed unseen guides long enough. Against this demand that they make themselves sightless moles in a subterranean tunnel both common sense and temper rebelled.

"Come out!" bellowed Tim. "Show yourselves!"

If any reply came, it was obliterated by another thunderclap outside. But his command was followed by involuntary compliance from an unexpected quarter. In the welter of rain and spray at the threshold, two blurred forms took shape. Slipping, scrambling, clawing for holds on the streaming slant, they lunged through the torrential downpour and reeled in under the protecting rock.

Something prompted León to turn his head. Instantly he whirled on his heels, rifle half lifted. The others, catching his startled movement, likewise spun about. The five confronted the two. For breathless seconds they stood rigid. Then they relaxed, their fingers leaving the triggers of their weapons.

At last they were looking at men indubitably human, mortal, and alive—or, at least, half alive. The pair stood now as if little life were left in them; stooped, with hands braced on knees, heads hanging, bodies wavering on legs which seemed about to sink under them; naked men battered into exhaustion by the tempest.

Whether they were the hitherto invisible escort, or other men who had been trailing behind the advancing explorers; whether they had been lying hidden just outside with the intention of following the strangers toward the inner gloom and thus blocking their retreat; or whether they were merely habitants caught at some distance outside by the deluge and forced to run for shelter—this the explorers never learned. It was quite apparent, however, that they now had no weapons and that they were pounded nearly senseless. Sorry creatures, indeed, for five heavily armed men to hold at bay.

In the recurrent glare and dimness nothing else could be made of them. Against the flashes they were black; in the alternating dull light they seemed white; their proportions were those of tall men. That was all that could be discerned.

McKay, with rifle dangling beside him, muzzle down, walked toward them. Knowlton shot a glance backward, seeking other naked people who might be stealing out from the invisible interior; found none, and moved after the captain, as did his companions. As they approached, the pair straightened up, with evident effort, and fell back a pace.

McKay halted at once, giving them a slow smile. Then he passed his rifle to Portonio, ostentatiously spread his empty hands, walked toward and past them, then turned to face them. They watchfully followed his moves, but took no step toward or away from him. For a moment he stood quiet. Then a wicked flash shot across the rain sheet, followed by a concussion like that of an exploding shell. Every man staggered. But, as McKay walked inward again, an exultant smile quirked his mouth. He had seen what he sought.

"Blue!" he yelled, gesturing toward his own eyes.

The rest nodded dully. They felt little surprize or pleasure. Indeed, they were more numb than ever from the effects of that latest electrical discharge. McKay himself stepped stiffly, as if his feet dragged.

All felt a desire to go farther in and evade some of the violence of that shocking bombardment. But to walk in blackness, unaware of what lurked beyond—no, that they would not do. The unknown fate of Frasco and his mates was still too well remembered.

Now León took a hand. Without attempting speech, he gave the newcomers a brief, eloquent talk by signs. First pointing inward, he made motions as if groping, squinted as if peering blindly about, and decisively shook his head. Then he raised a hand as if carrying a torch; held up his head confidently, moved his body as if walking boldly along, and nodded. His meaning was plain to all: That they would come in if lights were carried before them, but that otherwise they would not budge.

In return, one of the naked men motioned toward the Spaniard's rifle, then to the ground, indicating that guns must be left there. A curt negative was the reply. For a minute or two the pair stood motionless; then, slowly, began walking toward the rear of the place. The whites let them pass. They faded into the dark and were gone.

Another flash from without revealed them again for an instant, plodding steadily away along an apparently level and straight tunnel. When the glare was gone, the wanderers moved after them for a little distance; then, feeling their way to the wall at one side, sat down with their backs against it. The floor of the place was perfectly dry, indicating a slight upward slope from the water-swept threshold. And there, woefully hungry and dull-nerved from the electric shocks, they rested and awaited whatever might come.

Speech was impossible. Outside, the stupendous duel raged on with undiminished fury. At times a slight tremor in the solid rock was perceptible to the lounging quintet; the grim giant which had glowered at them across the waste land was quivering under the terrible blows of that other giant which had rushed westward to assail it. Within, no repetition of that hollow voice came through the darkness. It, too, was overwhelmed by the elemental uproar.

Time dragged away. At length, seemingly far within the mountain, dawned a vague spot of light; a mere ghost of illumination, bodiless as an *ignis fatuus;* vanishing at each flare of lightning, but reappearing in the succeeding rush of black. Then appeared a dot of real flame, apparently descending a gradual slope, along which its sheen had preceded it. Steadily it grew into blazing torches advancing at good speed. The waiting men arose and walked to meet them.

The lights stopped, waiting, as the bearers made out the advancing forms against the cavern mouth. They were two, and two only; the same men who had come from the storm. The outlanders, reaching them, gave them a quick survey, then glanced triumphantly at one another. No longer could there be any question in their minds as to the existence of such people as they sought.

The bright lights revealed to all the blue eyes which McKay had already detected. In the bushy hair, still dark with water, they struck brownish glints. They showed, too, that the skins of these twain were, though tanned, lighter even than those of the Maquiritares of Uaunana. The blond men of Guayana were found.

WITHOUT a word, one of them turned and led the way. The other waited to follow the strangers. McKay unhesitatingly took up the step. The file moved inward, Portonio, walking near the end, first giving the final torch-bearer a look of warning against any tricks.

For some distance they walked in a straight line, the footing remaining so nearly level that no grade was perceptible. The walls, McKay observed, were uniformly smooth and concave, arching into a roof not far overhead; the tunnel looked as if hollowed out by the scouring action of water. Presently it began to pitch upward, gradually at first, then more steeply, until the booted Northerners found it hard to maintain a grip on the smooth path. Thereafter it veered in irregular turnings, ever ascending. As the line forged on, the crashing of the storm diminished to blunt buffetings, then to dull rumbles, and at length to virtual silence.

"Where do you lead us?" abruptly demanded McKay.

His voice broke into the vaulted hush with the suddenness of a gunshot. The leader jumped, head jerking over shoulder, startled eyes staring. After a stumble, he recovered both equilibrium and equanimity. But he made no answer. Instead, he pressed on at an increased pace. McKay said no more.

Then the leader slowed, swinging his torch higher aloft. Before them rose a long ladder-like stair. The slope of ascent now had become so steep that even the habitants of the place could not maintain footholds without artificial aids. After giving the party a view of the work ahead, the pilot ascended at a pace which the others could not match. It took a wrathful yell to make him slow down.

"Wonder how the boneheads expected us to navigate this place in the dark," grumbled Knowlton. "It's bad enough with lights."

"That is the Indian way," replied León. "They know every inch of their road, and it never occurs to their minds that their visitors can not follow it as easily as they. *Caramba!* My legs have no lifting power in them!"

His complaint evoked a chorus of concurring grunts. It now was more than eight hours since they had eaten; and the last meal had comprised only monkey-fragments and water. For that matter, they had tasted nothing but unbalanced, unsalted meat rations for the past three days, while their vitality had been sapped by constant exposure to the murderous sun. Now their stamina was low.

But they clamped their jaws and mounted the crude staircase—only to find that it went on and on. To the first length another was joined, and to that a third, the whole structure climbing like an inclined railway upside down—the ties above the rails. Up and up and up it led, until the knees of the ill-nourished five seemed powerless to make the one step more which always waited beyond. When at last they reached a level where the lifting ended, they stopped and leaned against the nearest wall.

A slow grin passed over the face of the blue-eyed mountain man as he paused to view them. In that grin was something cruel, in those azure orbs something cold and crafty, that made McKay and León regard him with faces hardening. Then he turned away and went on. Breathing hard, they resumed their way.

All at once they found themselves in a larger space where a vague light filtered in from the right. A few more steps, and the right wall vanished. The light became a trifle stronger, coming from what seemed another cavern at one side. From that direction, too, came a steady splash of water.

The leader extinguished his torch. His mate at the rear did the same. Both walked aside, leaving the gun-bearing party to itself. That little band looked rapidly around a low-roofed natural room, in the center of which squatted a single figure.

"*Aquí!*" spoke that hunched form.

The voice was husky, yet penetrating. The shape was nondescript, the creature being wrapped in some sort of garment. Toward it the outlanders walked, and before it they stopped. They met the unwinking gaze of a pair of keen blue eyes, peering at them from a face of myriad wrinkles; the visage of a man of great age, utterly hairless, huddled in a dingy, coarse-woven cotton cloth. With his bare skull, sharp nose, and humpy body, he looked vulturine.

"*Quién es?*" demanded the ancient.

"Loco León, of the Ventuari," answered León himself, speaking slowly. "And friends of Loco León from far away. We are friends to all people of Guayana. We come in peace to see the white ones who are white like ourselves."

As he concluded, he took off his sombrero, exhibiting his fair hair. Knowlton followed his cue, and, after a minute, Tim likewise exposed his flaming mop. McKay and Portonio, the black-haired, kept their headgear in place.

The bald patriarch, motionless, studied the two blonds, his puckered visage unreadable. As his gaze fastened on Tim, a faintly puzzled expression dawned; and for some time he fixedly regarded the red hair.

At length, his eyes moved again, passing slowly over each of the strangers, noting all details of physique and dress. As he spied the two darts still sticking in the hats of the blond pair, a shadowy smile seemed to steal across his wizened visage. Then he appeared to recall the Spaniard's words. He voiced a single guttural. In response, the two who had led the way through the mountain came and stood beside him.

"To see white ones," he echoed. "You see them."

"You mean— There are no more?" asked McKay.

The bald head wagged from side to side.

"A woman. No others. All dead," he croaked.

A silence. The legend-hunters regarded him fixedly, then stared at the mute pair beside him, then once more looked around. The place was bare. Nowhere was visible any sign of other life. No sound came, save the beat of water without. The air seemed burdened with chill desolation.

"Wal, for the love o' Mike!" groaned Tim. "We come all this ways and stand here starvin', jest to look at two dummies and a mummy!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PEOPLE OF THE SHADOWS

"I THINK," quietly remarked Knowlton, "that this old buzzard is a cheerful liar. There must be more of these people. But the most pressing question now before the house is: When do we eat?"

The old one's sharp eyes watched him as he spoke, striving to read his face. They shifted to León as the latter translated the need of the moment into language intelligible to him.

"*Tenemos mucho hambre,*" declared the Spaniard. "We are very hungry."

"Eat your guns," sarcastically responded the ancient.

"Meaning that we'll get no grub until we act more friendly," surmised McKay. "Our manners are rather poor, at that. But still—" he paused, studying the trio before them—"I don't quite like their looks, and I'm giving no guns to them."

The faces turned toward him were not prepossessing. That of the oldster seemed more and more that of a cunning bird of prey. Those of the younger men were heavy, blank, and flat; heavy and blank with a vacancy hinting at low mentality, flat with the features of Indians; hard-mouthed, too, and icy-eyed. White though these mountain people were, their blood manifestly was not Caucasian—at least, not that of Saxon or Norse men. Their type, indeed, was more brutish than that of the Maquiritares; and about them was an animal-like wildness reminiscent of the Caño Tamara nomads.

But this was no time to quarrel with their potential hosts. Wherefore León deftly put the burden of proof of friendship on them. Symbolically he laid his gun at his feet; then, with a straight look, declared:

"Our guns are for enemies, not for friends. But friends do not refuse food to the hungry."

Slowly the figure stirred. From the enshrouding cloth rose a claw-like hand and a wasted arm. One of the tall fellows grasped the hand, lifted smoothly, and drew the old man erect. Once up, he stood and walked unassisted, though with dragging movements. He turned toward the light space whence came the dayshine and the sound of water; and, his tight-drawn garment outlining his skeleton legs, he tottered away, gaunt and ghostly. His satellites, unbidden, strode ahead of him and passed beyond sight. His visitors, uninvited, moved after, León retrieving his rifle as he started.

Around a rough corner of the cavern they passed, entering a smaller room. Light darted to meet them; light pouring through a big gap in the farther wall, but subdued by a slanting, awning-like structure of palm outside, which cut off all view of what lay beyond. The lower edge of this screen was on a line with the floor-level of the rock cavity, but as the party moved inward they glimpsed sheets of rain below it. The reason for the watery noise became clear. While they were in the bowels of the mountain the thunderstorm had ceased as abruptly as it had begun, but the clouds still were belching rain.

After one glance, however, the hungry men gave no further attention to outer conditions, for their gaze riveted on something far more pertinent. On the floor at one side lay a veritable banquet—or so it appeared to them. Cooked meats; a basket of manioc; luscious, melon-like lechosa fruits; boiled sweet yuca; and, in a large bowl, a dark drink, with small gourds lying close at hand—these viands waited, on a spread of fresh plantain leaves, for the men who now eyed them in astonished delight. At sight of their surprized faces, a chuckle shook the satiric old fellow whose inhospitable reception had led them to expect scant fare or none.

"*Bastant'?*" he snickered. "Enough?"

"Oh, boy!" gurgled Tim. "Lookit the lay-out he's had waitin' while he kidded us! I'd hug the ol' mummy, only I know I'd crack him."

The wide grin he gave the host was mirrored in the drawn faces of his companions. The old man of the mountain chuckled again; moved to the wall beside the repast, and stiffly essayed to squat. Portonio, smiling, gave him a hand, easing him down. As the clutching fingers relaxed from his big palm, though, the riverman ceased smiling and involuntarily rubbed that hand on his tattered breeches. Those wrinkled talons were cold and clammy as the grip of Death.

Dropping packs and standing guns and machetes along the wall, the guests squatted and fell to the welcome work of appeasing ravenous appetites. Having recently drunk of the rain-water, they gave no attention at first to the liquid. Nor did they eat much meat; their palates craved the other things, which would offset the uncompensated meat diet of the overland traverse.

While they busily masticated the fruit and starch, the wordless pair who had brought them there stood immobile against the farther wall. The "mummy," too, remained motionless, eating nothing. Even his eyes remained fixed, dwelling for long periods on the pair of blonds or the red-headed foreigner. Toward the black-haired pair he manifested no interest.

AT LENGTH, with their first avidity dulled, the Americans and the Spaniard paused. Only Portonio chewed indefatigably on. León distributed slips of his *tabari* bark, and cigarets were constructed. As the smoke drifted over the primitive banquet-table, the old man seemed to awake from a trance. He drew a long breath, inhaling the tobacco odor. Then he glanced at the bowl.

"Drink," he bade. "It is good."

"First we eat more," smiled León. "Drink comes later."

"Drink helps to eat," asserted the other. Again he sniffed the smoke.

The visitors contemplated the bowl. Its contents, dark and quiet, looked a pool of blood.

"*Yucut' 'sehi,*" laconically enlightened León. His eyes rested a moment on the ancient. In the same casual tone he added, in English—"Do not drink it."

With that he began making another cigaret. Up the backs of his companions crept a slow chill. Their thoughts darted back to the Oso camp, the gourd of cherry-like fruits—and the men of the Caño Cerbatana. None spoke. But across their faces swept a simultaneous repulsion. The piercing old eyes watching them narrowed by a hair's breadth.

León lighted the new roll of tobacco—that frightfully strong black tobacco to which he was habituated—and extended it to their sinister host. He eyed it; slowly accepted it; squinted at it again; put it awkwardly to his lips, and puffed. After a moment he drew the smoke into his throat and exhaled, as he had seen his guests do. His lashless lids began to blink rapidly. He coughed.

"Ol' King Tut, gittin' his first smoke," muttered Tim. "And that tobaccer's strong enough to knock an elephant cock-eyed. Look out he don't fall in the soup."

The momentary tension vanished in sudden grins. Somewhat to their surprize, the aged novice grinned also; a toothless grin betokening enjoyment of a new sensation. He took another long puff, blew it out with gusto, and did not cough over it. But he swayed a little against the wall.

"Game old sport," chuckled McKay.

"Yeah. And in about two minutes he'll be seasick on our table. Send these two gorillas to fetch a bucket and a mop."

The pessimistic prediction, however, failed. The narcotic made the oldster unsteady, but seemed also to exhilarate him. His grin stayed on his face, and he stared at his guests as if comfortably and amiably intoxicated.

McKay, observing him shrewdly, shot a question that caught him off guard.

"Where are all the other *blondos?*"

"At the houses," came the unwary reply.

McKay nodded, as if the location of the houses were quite well known to him. Casually he suggested—

"Send for them and let us give them smoke."

The old brain, half drugged, seemed to struggle. Various vague expressions flitted across the hatchet face. Another inhalation, deep-drawn, visibly unsettled his mental processes still further.

"Smoke would make them more foolish," he giggled. "Their heads are weak."

McKay nodded again, in the same casual way.

"Bring them here," he repeated. "We would see them again."

Then the befogged mind awoke. The blurry eyes focused sharply on the expressionless inquisitor, and the deceptive tongue sought to retrieve its slip.

"Others? There are none. An old man dreams. All are dead."

The captain smiled tolerantly; and, confident of his ground, took his turn at deception.

"You joke. We have seen them," he lied, his tone tranquil. "Our eyes are sharp. As you say, their brains are not so clever as yours, and when they thought themselves hidden—" He waved a hand, as if contemptuous of childish tricks. "Now let them stand before us."

The vulturine gaze bored into his steady eyes, then shifted rapidly over the other faces. All, following the Scot's canny lead, smiled as if enjoying a joke founded on certainty. For a moment the old trickster glowered; then sucked again at his *cigarrillo*. The tobacco, stronger than ever now that its nicotine was gathering at the butt, once more blunted his cunning.

"*Bien*," he hiccoughed. To the dull-faced pair beyond he muttered something. With noiseless steps one of them departed. The other remained.

León quietly went to making a third cigaret. As he rolled the inky shreds into their cylinder, he asked:

"How many years have you, father?"

"How many stars has the sky?" droned the ancient. "How many trees has the forest?"

"Ah. And so many years have brought much wisdom. No others here are as wise as you."

The bald flattery brought a tickled grin and a prompt assertion:

"None! All are fools. So they die."

"Fools must die," assented the Spaniard. "Guayana is no land for fools. Yet why are so many fools here, and only one wise man?"

"Because the new ones are not born wise. Each young one is more of a fool. Fools cannot live long."

"Ah. And how did the older ones die—those not so foolish?"

"Guaharibos. Fever. Age."

"*Sí?* So the Guaharibos come here and fight you? They are bad. Why do you not go to some other place, where Guaharibos will not reach you?"

The other stared, as if he thought the questioner mad.

"This is our place," he said.

"Ah. And so you never leave it. But from where did the first *blondos* come to this place?"

"Guayana."

"Guayana. But this is Guayana. So you came from nowhere else? What is your nation?"

"Maquiritare."

THERE was a long pause. The Americans frowned in puzzlement. These blonds were Maquiritares? Impossible! León studied his new-made cigaret, giving it unnecessary care; then lighted it and held it out.

"This is better, father. Drop the old one. You say you are Maquiritare? But I know many Maquiritares, and none like you. None are so white."

The claw-like hand wavered uncertainly as it reached for the new smoke, and the hairless lids drooped. But he did not lose his hold on the subject of conversation.

"None are pure white," he agreed. "None but us. We live apart. We first ones were born white from brown fathers. We do not know why. Our mothers were brown. Our brothers were brown. Mine were so. All the brown ones laughed. They called me '*Spañol*. Ahk!" He spat the hated name as if "Spaniard" were a worse epithet than "snake;" and, among the aborigines who had exterminated the Spaniards of the Caura, perhaps it was. "So I left them. I came here. Here were others like myself. We made all brown ones afraid. None come now to the Talking Mountain."

His head drooped, and he swayed a little forward from the wall. He essayed another inhalation; but the bark roll slipped from his fingers and fell. After a half-motion toward it he let it lie and settled himself back against the stone.

His auditors cast away their own charred stubs and resumed eating, meanwhile revolving in their minds the disjointed revelations which left so much unrevealed. Portonio, at last full-fed, picked up one of the small gourds and moved it toward the bowl. The low-voiced caution previously voiced by León apparently had escaped him. But Tim intervened with his usual directness. He shot out a big hand, knocked the calabash from the riverman's grasp, and growled:

"Watch yerself, ye big boob! *Cuidado!*"

Portonio looked blank. A look at the others, however, gave him ample warning. Every eye backed the Irishman's command.

Every eye, that is, except the old man's. The abrupt movement, the words, roused him from lethargy, and his gaze became keen and compelling.

"Drink!" he rasped. "It is good. It is strong. Drink it!"

"We do not like the *sehi*," quietly returned Knowlton. "We are not used to it. It makes us sick."

"Drink!" A shriveled hand pointed to the bowl. The cold eyes glittered.

"We drink what we like and when we please," snapped McKay. "Why do you try to make us drink this? What is in it?"

Slowly the hand sank. Over the blue orbs seemed to draw a snaky film. The bald head settled down on the wrinkled neck, huddling back into the dingy wrap. No answer came.

"M-hm," Knowlton murmured softly. "Looks as if your hunch was good, León. When we want a drink we'll catch some rain. Meanwhile let's eat everything in sight."

They attacked the remainder of the meal with new vigor; for every man of them felt that no further repasts would be forthcoming—at least, not at the bidding of that wizened creature who seemed to be master here. As they ate, they glanced now and then at the white savage behind them—who made no move—and listened for the shuffle of other feet. No such sound came to them. But, at length, another sound did: A muttering of subdued voices, drifting from the direction of the tunnel. Swiftly they arose.

More mutterings. Then around the corner strode the messenger who had gone to bring the rest of his people. He grunted something. The vulturine figure stirred, the head rising, the beak turning toward the outer room. In rasping tones, it spoke.

Slowly, from the shadows beyond, came a strange company. Man after man, each garbed in a short clout, each light of hair and blue of eye—and each carrying some weapon in a half-defensive position—stepped in and sidled along the farther wall. None was as tall or as muscular as the two who first had come within the ken of the visitors, but all looked sinewy and strong.

Then came women, and more women; a few wearing bead aprons like those of the girls of Uaunana, but more with mere squares of hand-woven, red-dyed cotton cloth; all with blond hair cut across at the back of the neck. Like a herd of sheep they pressed in and backed up against their men; and with sheep-like eyes and faces they stared at the bearded, travel-stained, sun-scorched foreigners clustered around the squatting patriarch and the sinister bowl.

WHEN all had entered, the room held some two-score blue-eyed Indians, yellow-white of skin, yellow of hair, the great majority of whom were women. Silent they stood, first running their eyes over each of the strangers, then concentrating their attention on the pair of blonds and the red-maned Tim.

As they stared, their faces took on gaping expressions, devoid of any emotion save the most primitive wonder; a peculiarly blank look which recalled the old man's contemptuous summary of them. Physically strong, but mentally weak, if not actually defective—such was the story told by those vacuous visages. Mature or adolescent, all bore that stamp of inferiority, rendered the more palpable by the universal heaviness of feature. As for beauty, not even Tim's hopeful eye could discern any trace of it among the female faces fronting him.

"Huh! A herd o' half-wits!" he muttered. "How do they git that way?"

Knowlton studying them as impersonally as if they were wax figures, answered:

"Inbreeding."

"Huh? What's that?"

"People in the same family mating, and their children mating—brother with sister—and so on. It always results in mental dullness. If it goes on long enough the children either die young or become idiots. It's common among isolated peoples. These people have been doing that. Old King Tut, here, says they were here before he came, and he must be a hundred years old. Now they've about reached their limit. Kids are fools, he says, and don't live. What they need is fresh blood."

McKay nodded. León, too, after a moment's thought, murmured agreement.

"They are people of the shadows," he added. "The shadow of this demon-mountain is on their lives and the shadow of stale blood on their minds. Soon they will die out, unless new men come and mate with them."

Knowlton started.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "I wonder if *we* are ——"

At that instant, as if reading his thought, the hunched figure at their feet broke in.

"Here are women for you." He leered up at them. "For you *blondos* and *el rufo*—the red man. We must have new life. You black ones, you shall have women also. But if your sons are black heads they die. We kill all such."

For an astounded moment the five stared down at him.

"So that's why we were escorted here," clipped McKay. "Not for mine, thanks!"

"Nor me neither," seconded Tim. "These dish-faced idjuts? Nix!"

The gimlet eyes below them, reading their faces in a flash, narrowed wickedly. Swift words rattled from the wrinkled lips.

The women sprang forward. Chattering, screaming, they threw themselves at the strangers who had refused them. Some laughed; others cried out as if enraged; all clutched at the recalcitrant bridegrooms, apparently determined to carry them off by force.

"Hot dog!" snorted Tim, hastily retreating. "This is bargain day and we're the bargains! Hey! Back up, ye squallin' she-cats!"

Half amused, half angered by the assault, he and his companions gave ground before the rushing females. The remnants of the meal were trodden under foot, the bowl upset, the old man trampled, the rifles knocked down.

Resistance seemed only to fan the flame of feminine determination. They crowded in harder than ever. And behind them, unnoticed, their men shoved at their backs, pushing them on the outlanders. Before the united impetus of forty, the five were swept back to the opening beyond which fell the rain.

"Look out!" suddenly roared McKay. "It's a frame-up! We're on the edge—they're shoving us over! Fight 'em! Hard!"

Too late, they began battling in earnest. The creatures swarming at them, women though they were by sex, were men now in their attack; strong, merciless, vindictive men. They had ceased the deceptive clutching; they were striking, butting, shoving. And through their mass now came boring the men who had pushed them on. These carried spears—and the white men's own rifles.

Braced on the very verge of the outer drop, the five fought furiously to win more foot-room. They attacked with bare hands only; no other weapons could be used under the circumstances; but with those fists they struck ruthlessly. It was useless. Against odds of eight to one, with no space for movement, they could not gain.

A spear-shaft, swung over the women's heads, struck solidly on Tim's crown. He staggered—and a woman kicked him over the edge. Other women, knocked down by fist-blows, clutched Knowlton and León by the ankles and yanked; others butted them in the body. Overbalanced, they pitched backward into nothingness. McKay battered his way into the jam, only to fall senseless from a blow by a rifle barrel. Portonio, grappling with three antagonists, two virulent women and one of the tallest men, received a similar blow on his unprotected head and collapsed.

A shrill screech of triumph rang through the hollows of the mountain. The prostrate captain and the huddled riverman were shoved vindictively over the brink. Down they fell—and only the people of the shadows, battered and bloody, remained in the caverns.

Among the shattered fragments of the bowl and the red slop thrown from it, the human vulture crawled stiffly to his feet and laughed like a ghoul.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PIT

THROUGH three fathoms of rain-soaked air the overthrown fighters fell headlong. Then they hit earth: steep slimy clay, slippery as wet soap, dropping at a precipitous grade for a hundred feet or more. Down this they slid and rolled, those still conscious clawing vainly for holds, those whose senses had fled tumbling like dead men. At the bottom they slewed out over a watery waste of the same greasy soil, coming at last to a jolting stop against a hummock.

Dazed, dizzied, gasping for breath and spitting out blobs of clay, Knowlton and Tim and León sat up and glowered at the slide down which they had sped. McKay and Portonio still were in motion, scooting lifelessly toward them. The captain's course ended in a rain-pool, where he lay face down; the riverman's in another puddle. With a simultaneous scrambling lunge, their comrades reached them and hauled them away from danger of drowning. Then they glared up through the rain at the projecting yellow hood whence they had been forced.

Dimly they saw, in the black-mouthed gap behind that awning, white figures flinging their arms about in exultation; and through the slash of the rain came taunting yells and screams. With smothered growls, Tim and Knowlton drew their pistols and opened a vengeful fire, hurling bullet after bullet at the treacherous gang.

Whether any of those bullets found a mark they never knew, for no form pitched over the edge. With the rain beating into their eyes, the raging assailants probably missed their targets. But they put a stop to the jeering. The screams became a screech of fear, and the white figures vanished as by magic.

"Yah! Ye yeller-bellied ——, that ain't so funny, hey?" howled Tim. "And as quick as this rain quits ye'll see us climbin' back at ye! Jest as quick as we can git a toehold on that toboggan-slide— Huh? What say, looey?"

"I said we'd better hunt cover before they start potting at us with our own guns." Knowlton fumbled another clip from his belt and jammed it into the butt of his side-arm; squinted upward again, then glanced around—and looked blank. There was no cover.

"*Diablo!* What hole are we in now?" muttered León, also staring about him.

They were in a hole indeed. For the first confused moments they had thought themselves again outside the mountain—thrown from a cavern in some other face of the block, to which the tunnel had led. Instead, they still were within the stone walls. All around them soared great grim cliffs, encompassing a space perhaps half a square mile in extent, their more distant reaches looming vague but unmistakable through the rain. The bottom of the pit, where they now stood, was merely an uneven mass of slimy stones, clay hummocks, and ooze, wherein grew no trees or brush—not even a green weed. As for human habitation, there was none. The place was a ghastly dungeon.

The three looked all about, and at one another, without a word. They peered up again at the hole in the wall, seeing nobody. The retaliatory fire which they had half expected did not come. A narrow study of the spongy slide convinced them that it was unscalable until dry. So they did the only thing there was to do: Set about resuscitating their prostrate fellows.

Then, if ever, the stony-hearted gods of Guayana must have laughed, looking down on the intrepid invaders of their domain whose long trail now ended in a slough of despond; prisoners of a herd of mental degenerates; smeared from head to foot with yellow slime; soaked with rain, lacerated and contused from their fight and fall; working to prolong the life of companions who, perhaps, might find in continued existence only the torment of lingering death. It was a spectacle to make the merciless powers of that harsh hinterland roar with sardonic glee.

But the men themselves were by no means beaten yet. Even while the three toiled to restore consciousness to the two, their eyes glanced aside from time to time in search of some avenue of escape. These were no spiritless slaves of circumstance, drooping under the blows of malign Fate; they were tenacious fighters accustomed to overcoming evil chance and emerging unconquered from catastrophe.

Nor were the hard-headed Scot and the brawny Venezuelan the men to succumb long to the shocks of fighting. Under the ministrations of their comrades and the battering of the cold rain they soon struggled back to knowledge of their surroundings. Their eyes opened; stared blankly a second; focused on the set faces above them, and rolled in a comprehensive survey of their environment. Then they sat up, scowling as pain streaked through their stunned brains, but voicing no plaint.

As they did so, the rain, which, though heavy, was by no means the smothering deluge of the initial onset, dwindled to a dying shower. Then it ceased. The leaden sky lighted. The stark cliffs, no longer veiled, seemed to stride forward, closing in on the trapped adventurers. From them dripped the wash of their summits, spattering with a bleak sound on the sodden bottom of the pit. Unspeaking, McKay slowly scanned the whole cheerless cage, his gaze returning at length to the palm rainshed jutting above the slide. In all the encircling expanse, that was the only sign of an exit.

NOW, as the eyes of all rested once more on that high hole, from it issued a croaking voice pronouncing their doom. It was the voice of the old vulture; yet now it was deeper, stronger, with a hollow tone reminiscent of the sepulchral command first heard issuing from the outer cave. And, peer as they might, the men below could see nothing beyond that awning save empty dark.

"Loco León!" it called. "You drink or you die. You, and the men you bring here, stay here. You have walked Guayana alone unharmed. Now you have walked with new men. You have brought them to the forbidden place. From this place no white men go out.

"You will drink the *sehi*. You will be black. Then you can come up again. You will have women. Your sons will be strong. Drink or die. There is no escape."

The sentence of the unseen judge fell with pitiless finality. Minutes passed, the silence broken only by the spat of the cliff-drain. Then León answered.

"If we become black our children will be black——"

"No," broke in the voice. "The sons of blackened white men are white."

"Then why have you not given your women to El Blanco Negro—Black White?"

"He is mad. We want no crazed children."

"Will not the *sehi* make us mad also?"

"No. Your heads are strong. You will only be black."

Another silence. Then a final adjuration—

"Drink or die!"

McKay, now standing up and fixedly regarding that stony mouth of judgment, spoke curtly.

"We have no *sehi* to drink."

"It will come," was the grim promise.

"When?"

"At sunrise. Now there is none."

"*Bueno*. We shall be waiting."

There was an ominous undertone in the captain's rejoinder, and a hard glimmer in the gray eyes he turned to his companions. They read his thought: To attack and capture the bearers of that blood-red drink and force them to lead the way to escape. Tim gave a subdued growl, Portonio an eloquent grunt. From above came no further sound.

As they once more looked around them, a sudden brilliancy lighted up the place. The clouds had broken and vanished; the westering sun had shot into the dungeon. Its slanting rays did not strike the bedraggled little company, but the farther wall seemed to be wholly bathed in light. Moved by a simultaneous impulse, they began walking toward that hot flood, in which they might dry their clothing and drive from their bones the chill already settling there—a clammy cold born not alone of wet garments. That radiant sun, which so recently had been a murderous monster sucking their life, now seemed a friend and comforter amid dank horrors.

The ground before them rose in an irregular mound, whence protruded greasy-looking rocks. Slipping on the miry surface, they slowly mounted it. They were halfway up when Knowlton halted, exclaiming:

"Say! There's a drain to this hole somewhere! Tons of water have been tumbling in here in the last hour, but there are only shallow puddles. If all that water can get out so fast——"

He left the sentence unfinished and began scrambling upward with sudden energy.

"Any way out of this place is guarded, Merry," was McKay's pessimistic prediction.

But he, too, pushed on with lengthened paces. At the top of the mound, all looked eagerly about. They saw only more dirt, rock, and pools.

Down the next slope they slid; up another rise they labored; and so they passed to the end. There they found Knowlton's surmise correct—but unavailing. Near the cliff wall yawned a hole, into which mucky water still was draining; but its sides fell straight downward, and from somewhere far below came the gruesome gurgle of a subterranean stream. Through that exit they could pass only as corpses.

Near by, half hidden in the clay and befouled by spattered dirt, lay ghastly evidence of the futility of efforts to escape from this impregnable prison: Human bones. A skull leered hollowed-eyed; yellowed ribs and disjointed limbs protruded. Not far off glistened something else, smoothly rounded and just visible above the soil, which looked to be the top of another skull, buried by water-borne sediment The captives gave those grim relics one hard look; then turned from them, and began to strip off their soaked clothes.

Along the base of the wall was a slope already drying under the fierce sun, and on it they spread their few belongings and squatted in the heat. McKay's eyes roved along the heights, noting that, although unscalable, they were considerably lower than when seen from the *sabana* of the ghost-trees. After awhile he said, as casually as if they could leave at any time:

"This place used to be a lake. Water ate out those caves and the tunnel, working along weak strata. Finally this hole in the bottom opend up too, and that stream down below emptied the bowl."

"How come a lake up here?" scoffed Tim, in a half-interested tone.

"The whole country used to be as high as the top of this mountain, or higher. Scientists say this is one of the oldest parts of South America. Erosion wore it all down. Only the hard rock stayed put. In a few more million years this will all be gone, too; eaten away, grain by grain, by rain and wind."

"And then we can walk out o' here, I s'pose."

"Sure. If we can hold out that long."

Grim smiles answered the stoic jest. They moved out of the sun, now becoming too hot. Then León said, thoughtfully:

"I do not believe we shall be here so long. I believe that my luck will show us some way out. One thing in which I firmly believe is the luck of Loco León. It has never yet failed me in a tight place."

"What's that? Do you carry a luck-piece—a talisman, or fetich, or medicine-bag, or something?" asked Knowlton.

"No. It is just luck," was the calm answer. "I have been near death many times, and always something saved me. And I believe my luck will hold good until I deliberately do a wrong to other men. If I had come here to harm these people my luck might fail. But I did not. Nor did you. So there will be a way out."

AT THIS naive confession of faith in a vague deity of luck, the others looked curiously at him. His tone, his self-possessed manner, told that he meant what he said. And, primitive though his belief might sound, it struck a responsive chord; for every man there possessed an instinctive faith in natural justice, wholly dissociated from the creeds and dogmas which the civilized world calls religion. But then their glances strayed to the bones over yonder in the dirt. If those men had failed to find a way of escape, why should fortune favor the new captives?

"What do your omens say about our luck, Tim?" asked Knowlton, with a thin smile.

"They say we're clean out o' luck," was the morose rejoinder, "like they've been sayin' all along that we would be. Me, I don't see no good fairies roostin' in this hellhole. And about doin' deliberate wrong to any guy—I'll tell the cock-eyed world the things I'm goin' to do to these gorillas if I git half a chance will be deliberate and cruel."

McKay, his head still grinding, lifted a hand to the big lump protruding above one ear, and his hard jaw boded no good for any white Indian who might fall into his grip. The others, saying nothing, glanced toward the distant yellow blotch with ominous eyes. Even León, despite his odd scruple against planning injury to any man, looked decidedly grim; for, now that he was the wronged one, retaliation was altogether in accordance with his code.

But the omens for repayment were, as Tim said, unpropitious. And now, as his words aroused memories of the foreboding occurrences along their way, each reviewed them and found bygone enigmas becoming clear in the light of retrospect.

There was the dying Curro, with his unintelligible gaspings about something pertaining to mountains, talk, and death. Now it was glaringly plain that his fragmentary words had been no mere crazy gibberish, but a desperate warning:

"Do not go to the Mountain That Talks. It is death!"

Curro had known—and Frasco and the rest had known—that these señores, in order to reach the blond people, must go to that awful Talking Mountain; and that there waited some dire fate. Yet so deep-rooted was their dread of the "demons" abiding there that they had been unable to put into words the horrors which, in their minds, must be met at that ogre-like mountain. By what monstrous deeds had these white ones made themselves regarded as fiends by the other people of Guayana? Guyana alone knew. But their infernal reputation must have originated from a deliberate diabolism, planned and practised by the ruthless vulture of the cavern and by others of his time.

And there was the demented Black White, with his ravings in the night: His command to go back or lose their faces and become living dead men—men like himself, blackened and lost forever in this trackless ghost land. His meaning was clear now. And there was Juancito, with his point-blank refusal to help them travel the Periqueta, and his laconic "*Maluc*'!" Good old Juancito!

And the mysterious appearance and disappearance of the *blondo* messenger, delivering a command from the "demons," which the little chief dared not disobey; and the surveillance of the invisible attendants enroute up the demon-river and across the weird *sabana*, the guidance to food and water, the smoke-signals, all these were the work of the old man of the mountain, luring the adventurers on for his own fell purpose.

There had been a satiric significance, too, in the dyed darts affixed as guiding pointers along the overland trail: The red and black symbolizing either the crimson *sehi* and its infernal effect, or blood and death. And now, unless the Spaniard's faith in his luck proved well founded, those two alternatives alone remained: Blackness of life, or blackness of death.

Yes, many things were clear looking backward. Looking ahead, however, all was formless, with only the vaguest possibilities taking semisolid shape in their minds. So, as the sunlight crept to the wall and began inexorably rising to the heights where they could not follow it, they donned their still damp clothing and lay down in a row on the sloping surface of half-dried clay—awaiting a new day and whatever it might bring forth.

CHAPTER XX

McKAY GAMBLES

DARKNESS, blank and dank, filled the ancient lake bed to the rim when Portonio sat up. A full moon had passed over unseen and now was lost. But another light, faint but unmistakable to his experienced eyes, was beginning to steal across the high heavens.

"Señores!" he called. "Day comes."

The four who, like himself, had slept fitfully through twelve hours of clammy chill needed no second summons. Their heads lifted; their hunched forms straightened out; and, shivering, they pushed themselves up to a sit. As they moved, each set his teeth to repress groans of pain. Through their wrenched and battered muscles, stiffened by hours on damp ground, darted sharp twinges of protest against action.

For a few minutes each rubbed his various spots of injury, flexed arms and legs, bent backward, bowed and twisted his lame neck. None, as yet, tried to walk. The spot where yawned that deadly sink-hole was invisible, and nobody was sure of its precise position. With clumsy fingers they tried making cigarets—only to find that their pouches had not been altogether damp-proof, and that now their contents would not ignite.

"For the love o' Mike git the tobaccer dried out when the sun gits up," growled Tim. "A drag on a butt would do me a million dollars' worth o' good right now."

He felt the pocket where reposed his air-tight match-safe, reassuring himself that it still was there.

Rapidly the sky brightened. More slowly, the gloom of the pit turned to a misty half-light. When the nearer ground became unmistakably plain, they stiffly arose and began picking their way toward the other end of the place. Sunrise was at hand—and the coming of the diabolical drink of blackness.

In silence they pushed through the mist, and in silence they stood presently at the foot of the slide. León, trying a few tentative steps up that slope, slid backward. Thereafter they waited, motionless, watching the hole which grew more visible as the thin fog crept upward; wondering, too, how the bearers of the *sehi* were to traverse that descent and return to the cave. A rope seemed the only possible means; and they were alert to seize both rope and men—or women—even if covered meanwhile from above by their own rifles.

The people of the mountain seemed in no haste. At the mouth of the cavern appeared no figure. Sunlight blazed on the crests of the cliffs and began steadily creeping down one wall. Outside it must be broad day. Still no sign of life was discernible.

"Guess we pulled a bad boner yesterday in shooting up the place," confessed Knowlton. "If we hadn't, they'd probably have thought we were disarmed, and we'd have a better chance today."

"Just so, señor," agreed the Spaniard. "Pistols are little known in this land of Guayana, and I believe they are not known at all to these *blondos*. When they pushed us away from the guns and machetes they thought all our weapons gone, and if you had not fired— . But it is done. And I doubt that we shall be able now to lay hand on one of these people. Ah! Look!"

At a corner of the cave mouth something was slowly coming over the edge. They tensed. It paused a moment—a yellow-brown thing of indeterminate character, vague of outline, in the shadow of the palm hood. Then it slowly descended. As its shape and identity became clear, the waiting five voiced a grunt of disappointment bordering on despair. As León had predicted, they were not to capture any blond Indian.

The moving thing was a huge gourd bottle, being lowered at the end of a line. It swung down the vertical drop to the beginning of the slope; there it slid slowly, cunningly maneuvered by the unseen holder of the cord, down the slick surface of the clay, rolling in short zigzags from side to side, but ever held in control, ever slipping nearer to the powerless captives. At length it was within their reach; a balloon-shaped container, its only opening at the neck, and that opening tightly closed with a wooden plug, above which the line was attached.

With a sudden spring Knowlton seized the line and yanked hard. The fierce tug met with no resistance. The cord flew loose from the cave and dropped. Instead of jerking some one above out over the edge, his wrench only unbalanced him, and he tumbled back among his comrades. From the cavern sounded a hollow chuckle, and then the voice of the vulture.

"*Yucul' 'sehi!*" it croaked. "Food and drink. Eat it—drink it—or die!"

"We'll see ye in —— first, ye lousy ol' snake!" blared Tim, aiming a savage kick at the bomb-like container. The kick missed, for his other foot slipped and he nearly fell. Before he could right himself a new and more dreadful voice broke from overhead.

"Yee - hee - hah - hah - hah!" it yelled. "Fools! Fools! Yah-hah-hah! I told you so! You idiots! You *would* come here, would you, you boobs? And now how do you like it? Have a drink on the house! Ya-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

"Urrgh!" shuddered Tim. "That —— banshee again!"

He and the rest peered sharply upward, striving to fathom the dimness of the interior. They failed. If a black face was looking down at them, it was so merged with the farther gloom as to be indistinguishable.

"Drink hearty, Loco!" jeered the unseen madman. "A bucket of blood! Lap it up, boys! And then itch and scratch, and watch yourselves turn black! Black! Black as the soot of ——! Nigger men like me! Dead men like me! We'll all walk together then! Six dead men without faces! Yah! Hah!"

From the farther wall, behind the trapped five, faintly echoed:

"Yah! Hah!"

León spoke, his voice calm, yet tinged with bitterness.

"*Buen' dia'*, White. We thank you for your courtesy. Perhaps we shall drink. Perhaps not. But whether we do or not, you are no more my friend. In the past I have done whatever I could for you. This is your gratitude. You can walk alone hereafter—or with the ——; not with us."

A brief silence. Then an angry yell:

"Shut up! I warned you, *hombre!* You called me 'ugly-mug!' Now take your own ugly mug and keep it! You——"

McKay broke in, his tone chill as a sword-blade—and as cutting.

"You, White! Listen to me a minute. You think you used to be a white man, do you? And an American? You never were! If you'd ever had a spark of white-man decency you'd never see white men turned black. You'd give them a hand out of the hole. But you're worse than black—you're yellow! You always were yellow. You're a dirty, low-down traitor to the whole white race.

"You're a rottener specimen of humanity than these degenerates you associate with. They don't know any better. You do. You're no man. You're a rat! A sneaking, squeaking rat in a hole, with all the instincts of a rat; a coward; a biter in the dark; a filthy animal. Your actions prove it. You'll never walk with us. We'd spit in your face if you ever came near us. And what's more, we're not drinking this stuff. We've got backbone enough to die clean. This for you!"

WITH the last words he kicked the gourd. His kick was surer, his footing firmer, than Tim's. His boot shattered the calabash. A wave of red gushed down the incline, the bloody-hued liquid and its clots of manioc sweeping around the feet of the five as if trying to contaminate them by contact. Involuntarily they backed out of it. And then from above them burst the torrent of a madman's rage.

Furious howls of vituperation, incoherent but vitriolic, replied to the Scot's denunciation. Blistering curses, unintelligible snarls, maniacal shrieks, tumbled in a cataract of horrible sound. Black White was raving in a paroxysm of wrath. Yet, despite his threats of instant death, he fired no shot. Whether no gun was near him at the moment, or whether some other circumstance prevented lethal retaliation, none but himself could know. But he wore out his fury and his voice in empty noise. And McKay, an inexplicable smile showing at the corners of his hard mouth, stood unmoved and listened to all of it.

At the end he spoke again; five words only, but in a tone of such searing contempt that those words stung worse than all the violence just hurled from above.

"A white man? You? Pah!"

He spat on the ground; turned his back, and walked away toward the sunlit wall. His companions followed in silence. And the man or men above watched them go—in silence. Not a word came now from the cavern.

At the base of the precipice on which the radiance was creeping down, the prisoners squatted and waited. For a long time nothing was said. McKay, cold-eyed, stared fixedly at the barren clay ahead of him. Knowlton and Tim, scowling, prodded absently at the dirt. Portonio, expressionless, remained immobile, only his brown eyes moving at times to one or another of his señores. León brooded.

"What is done is done," he said, at length. "Yet I wish you had not destroyed that gourd, capitán. It was in my mind that if all else failed we might pretend to drink that *sehi*, and, in some way or other, blacken ourselves to look as if the poison had worked. So we might again reach the caves; and, once there——"

"No chance," disagreed McKay. "I figured on that possibility in the night. There's nothing to blacken ourselves with. Not even a lead-pencil. No wood to char. Only thing we could burn would be our clothes—if they'd dry out enough to take fire—and they'd see us do it and get wise.

"Besides, they'd never let us come up with our guns on. They'd make us send up everything first—clothes and all, probably—on a line. So we'd have nothing to fight with except our hands, and those aren't enough against that gang. We can't fake it. I'm gambling on another chance. It's a hundred-to-one shot, but it may win. If not, we're out of luck."

"Ye mean climbin' up there when the ground gits hard," guessed Tim. "Tonight in the dark. And then we'll do one o' them human ladder acts against the rock, with the top guy crawlin' over the edge with a gun in each fist. That guy is goin' to be me!"

"I did figure on that," acknowledged the captain, "but it's no good. It seemed possible until just now. An all-day sun hardening that clay—a careful climb after dark—and a five-man tower. But we can't get up that clay, sun or no sun. It'll never dry out enough. I saw an ooze of water from it. There's a seepage somewhere up the slope, and that slope is always wet. The rest of this ground is firmer than it was yesterday, but that place isn't."

Gloomy frowns ensued. León, who had experimented with the ascent, slowly nodded.

"True," he admitted. "It is like grease. Then what is the thing you gamble on, Capitán?"

"A change of heart."

The others eyed him in perplexity.

"Ye mean them gorillas will git merciful?" scoffed Tim. "Fat chance!"

"Not merciful. But perhaps a bit ashamed or a bit sensible. I'm playing White for the shame and old Tut for the sense. You heard me roast White. Got his goat, didn't it? Burned him on his sorest spot. All right. That spot's going to ache for a quite a while. He may try to ease it by doing something to prove that he's still a white man under the skin.

"If I get him right, he must have been a he-man once, and proud as the ——. It was his pride that made his brain crack. And, cracked as he is, he's still proud. No question of it. Wanted to fight us all at Monoblanco to show how good a man he was. Now, after the names I called him, he'll want to prove that he's better than these half-wits. That's how I'm betting.

"As for the old mummy, he wants us alive. Everything proves that. He brought us here to put fresh blood into his gang. We're his last hope. No other white men are coming in here. If he starves us his pet scheme goes glimmering. I'm betting that in a day or two he'll offer to compromise somehow. Until that time comes we won't give an inch. It'll be tough for us in the meantime, but we've got to stick it out to the finish."

"Right!" assented Knowlton. "No surrender! Frankly, I'm not much enthused over either of your long shots, Rod. But I've seen dark horses make good more than once before now. Between your psychological hunches and the famous luck of Loco León we may break loose yet. How's your luck feeling just now, Loco?"

"Not so strong, at this moment," admitted the Spaniard. "Luck always has been with me when I could do something to help it. I have never had to sit and wait for it to come to me. But I still do not feel that it is dead, though it may be a little sick for the time."

"That's the spirit!" His fellow blond slapped him on the shoulder. "Luck and nerve are brothers. As long as a fellow hangs onto his nerve, luck's somewhere near him."

"Yeah. Ye said a mouthful that time," approved Tim. "The guy that's got no nerve is always out o' luck, and serves him right. Wal, there ain't a quitter in this gang, I'll tell the world. Lookit ol' Tonio, here; he dunno one word what we're sayin', but he knows we're up against it good, and he ain't battin' an eye."

As he said, the riverman's scant knowledge of English had given him only an inkling of the nature of the talk, but he understood the general situation thoroughly; and his quiet courage was unruffled. In fact, as the others looked at him he smiled—that slow, easy smile of his, betokening a heart unafraid. And when León put into Spanish the gist of the conversation, he merely answered:

"*Sí.* We shall be hungry. I have been hungry at other times."

"You would not drink the *sehi?*" probed McKay.

With his usual deliberation, Portonio spat toward the cavern. No further answer was needed.

DOWNWARD crept the sun. They drew out their soggy tobacco, and Tim spread his shirt as a drying-ground for the precious shreds. When the hot light reached the dirt the men themselves sat for a time in it, then moved to shade; for not one of them now possessed a hat. Hungrily they watched the brown and black particles until they judged them dry enough for smoking; then made an experimental cigaret in one of León's bark sheets, and found that it would burn. A minute later all were puffing at hastily built brown cylinders.

Not until those little rolls had burned to the tiniest of stubs did any one speak again. Then Knowlton, who had been speculatively eying the high hole where unseen men undoubtedly were watching their every move, turned a quizzical glance to his partners and announced:

"I'm going to back your play, Rod—with a song. If White ever was a regular fellow he's sung this one himself many a time. See if we can get a rise out of him. Whether we do or not, we'll show 'em we're not running up any white flag. All together, now! Let's go!"

He hummed the first line. Both McKay and Tim suddenly grinned and nodded. And a few seconds later the bleak cliffs were echoing with a roaring, rollicking chorus; a rough old ditty devoid of true music, but a man-song charged with defiance to disaster and despair, death and demons:

"Hail! Hail! The gang's all here!
What the hell do we care?
What the hell do we care?
Hail! Hail! The gang's all here!
What the hell do we care now?"

Over and over they sang it, Tim bawling it at the top of his raucous voice, León joining in lustily as he learned the words and air, and even Portonio adding an inarticulate bass when the tune became familiar from repetition. Whether it evoked any answer from the cave they did not know at first, for they roared away until their throats ached. But then, when they paused for breath, a response did come. From that hooded opening howled a voice like that of a man in pain.

"Shut up! For God's sake shut up!"

"Huh!" Tim sneered loudly. "Listen to that yeller dog barkin' at *men!*"

McKay chuckled again, keenly watching the hole and awaiting an outburst. None came.

"Let it go at that," he said quietly. "I think it's working. Now we'll take it easy and see what results we get—if any."

CHAPTER XXI

INFERNO

SLOWLY, silently, an interminable day snailed past; a day of glaring sun and grilling heat.

The pit, shut off from all breezes by its towering walls, became an oven. Down on its barren floor the luckless prisoners moved their positions hourly, following the patches of shade creeping along the base of the cliffs. Despite this partial shelter from the dazing rays, they roasted in the windless atmosphere. As the hours wore on and the full torridity of afternoon smote down into the rockbound dungeon, it turned into a veritable hellhole.

In the early hours it was not so bad, for then the combined coolness of the bygone rain, the long night, and the shadows of the tall crags still remained. In those hours the captives, heartened by their tobacco, moved all about the place or discussed their position from all angles. They plodded along the foot of the encompassing precipice, studying every yard of earth and stone, seeking any hitherto unseen opening alow or aloft.

The mute evidence of those unburied bones near the sink-hole was sufficient to prove that no line of escape existed, but these newcomers were overlooking no possibilities. When they had completed their circuit they were convinced that no possibilities existed. There was one way out, and only one; the natural tunnel by which they had come in.

Beyond the palm hood they still could discern no human face or figure; and when the sun struck that yellow shield the inner shadow became a pocket of blackness. Yet they felt the gaze of unseen eyes constantly watching, and knew well enough that one or more, perhaps all, of the people of the mountain were lurking there and following their every move. Wherefore, adhering to their policy of defiant contempt, they feigned complete indifference. As the pangs of increasing hunger became more acute they surreptitiously tightened their belts; and assuming positions of ease in a shady spot, they preserved an air of nonchalance which might or might not wear on the patience of their jailers.

"We now have nothing to do but rest, señores," remarked Portonio, with a philosophical grin.

"And it is the best thing we can do," added León. "To move about is only to make ourselves more hungry and wear ourselves out more quickly."

So they lolled and half-drowsed, rousing up to talk whenever some one voiced a thought. At length Knowlton reflectively remarked:

"I wonder, since I've had a look at these people and sized up their mentality—I wonder where they ever dug up enough cleverness to play ghosts all the way across the savanna. Seems as if that would require a higher grade of intelligence than they have."

"Animal cunning, plus training and orders by the old man," surmised McKay. "They've been brought up that way. The old-timers worked out the ghost stuff, probably—they took advantage of the echo and the acoustics of the tunnel mouth, and invented more or less hideous hocuspocus to make the whole region frightful.

"Or maybe this old croaker up yonder was the one who invented it all. He's certainly the brains of the whole outfit now. And he had our whole route mapped out for us, after that revengeful dog of a Black White eavesdropped on us at Monoblanco and let him know our plans. And he——"

"One moment, *capitán*," interposed León. "I do not believe White did that thing. That *blondo* who reached Uaunana so soon after we did—he was sent from this place before we even reached Monoblanco. He must have been. Perhaps he and White traveled together, although I am quite sure that White does not live at this place. At any rate, he could have lain at the Periqueta mouth to see whether we turned in there, and, finding that we did not, followed us to Uaunana, and there learned our intentions from Juancito. Then he could, and did, dash back to the Periqueta. The things which followed—" He paused, thinking.

"Were all worked out in advance by the old man," McKay finished. "Maybe you're right about White. I hope so. But this old buzzard had everything pretty thoroughly doped out beforehand, beyond a doubt. He coached his gang on what to do, and they followed orders throughout.

"They're not imbeciles, even if they are fools compared to him; they can carry out orders all right. And at this end of the line he had everything ready, even to the woman decoy and the big feed. We were to arrive here half dead with thirst and drink up all his doctored *sehi*. But his plans skidded a bit when that unforeseen thunderstorm gave us a bath and a drink before we saw his bowl; also when León's fierce tobacco made him wobble and overplay his hand."

"D'ye s'pose that smoke really hit him as hard as it looked, or was he fakin'?" suggested Tim. "Seems funny he never had a smoke, when tobaccer grows all over South Ameriky."

"Apparently it doesn't grow here. He wasn't faking. It nearly knocked him over. But he didn't quite lose his grip. He saw we were wise to the *sehi* stunt, so he pulled the harem mob scene. And we fell for it."

"Yeah. We sure fell for it." Tim sourly eyed the slide. "I've fell for women before, but not as fast or as hard as this time. Wonder where this gang lives. It ain't here in this hole, or up in the cave; they were all wet when they come in. Must be outside somewheres. Le's see, the ol' skate said 'at the houses,' didn't he? Then that big rat-hole must be his own private hangout. They wouldn't put that big palm awnin' on there unless somebody lived there right along. And he ain't husky enough to walk up and down that tunnel."

"He may be stronger than he appeared," León demurred. "His weakness may have been assumed. I believe it was his voice that called us into the cave, and he must have been somewhere near the outer end when he spoke. But still I think that he lives in the rock, as you say, and not outside. The others must have a place in the woods, where they can grow their food."

McKay nodded.

"Well," said Knowlton, "while we're explaining everything—and getting it all wrong, maybe—explain the origin of these highbinders. They're Indians in everything but color. How do they get that way?"

There was a silence. At length León ventured:

"Señores, to that question there is no answer. They themselves do not know. Yet there is a tale in this land which may explain. As you know, the men of Guayana, many years ago, killed the Spanish soldiers of the Caura. I have heard—though I do not know it to be true—that a few of those soldiers were not killed; that they were spared because some of the Maquiritare women wanted them kept alive.

"Whether they were blond Spaniards like myself I do not know; nor do I know what became of them, except that they never were seen again outside these hills. If they were blonds, and mated with the light Maquiritare girls, blond children might be born. Is it not so? And in so light a race of people as the Maquiritares, might not blonds be born in later generations even though the fathers and mothers were not light of hair and blue of eye?"

"By George! That's a possibility!" exclaimed Knowlton. "Just a bare possibility, but still possible. Freaks of heredity. And, because they're freaks, virtually outcasts. And if blond mated with blond, it would perpetuate the type. Or would it? I'm no biologist.

"Let's see, old Tut said they killed dark children; so they've had dark ones. Specialization of a type. Now that the type is going to seed mentally, the old cock-of-the-rock demands fresh blond blood—ours. Chances are that he knows his own blood is partly white man's, but he won't admit it. Well, that solves the mystery to my satisfaction."

"Me, I don't care where they come from, but I can tell 'em all where they can go to," rumbled Tim. "The mystery I want cleared up is, how do we git out o' here if Cap's hunches and Loco's luck don't work?"

"We don't," was McKay's blunt response.

Talk languished again. They moved to a new patch of shadow. As they lay there, beginning to swelter in the increasing heat, each mentally faced a fact of which none spoke: that they could not exist long in that hole. Food they could do without for a number of days, if needs must. Water they might find, in small sips, at the foot of that seeping slope, despite the daily evaporation. But soon the exposure, the inevitable weakness, would breed fever.

IN ALL that day no voice sounded again from the cave. No further proffer of the red *yucut' 'sehi* was made. To all appearance, the stubborn intruders now were being left to lingering death. And, by the time the sun rays lifted out of the hole and a slight coolness began to steal in, death itself seemed almost preferable to continued existence. The five lay dull-eyed, half comatose, drawing labored breaths which failed to alleviate the smothering sensation born of motionless air.

For some time after sunset the surrounding rock threw off the heat stored up during the day, and the abyss remained insufferable. Then, at last, a gradual lowering of temperature set in, and the dazed victims began to revive. By the time they arose to their feet the ancient lake bed was a lagoon of darkness. They were not far from the cavern, however, and knew their bearings well enough to walk surely and noiselessly; and toward that cavern and its slippery chute they moved. Despite McKay's earlier prediction, they hoped to find the surface of the acclivity sufficiently dry to allow climbing; and now, before the baking effect of the sun had been overcome by the nightly ooze from within, was the time to make the attempt.

"Slow and easy does it, if it can be done," cautioned Knowlton, sotto voce. "No sudden moves. Gradual lifts. And no talking!"

A muttered chorus of agreement. All glanced at the sky, wondering whether the moonlight reflecting faintly downward from it would make their forms visible against the yellow clay to any one at the cave above. The moon itself, though big and brilliant now, could not for some time rise high enough to shoot its direct beams into the abyss; but the sky-sheen might betray them to some keen eye. There was no indication, however, of any watch at the palm hood; no light or sound. As they stole onward they felt that the uneven floor had grown much harder. Hope began to lift its head.

But, at the foot of that slide, it drooped again. There the soil seemed almost as wet as before.

The pool which had been so big yesterday had shrunk to a shallow, warm puddle. But it still was there. Despite its stagnancy, they drank from it; drank it virtually dry, in fact, for it was the only water to be had. Then they stood a moment peering up at the palm hood, a barely discernible spot of lighter darkness than the rock around it. Not the slightest indication of life could be detected up there.

Crouching, they began tentative ascent of the first grade—a comparatively easy slope leading to the stiff slant beyond. Their feet sank slightly, but held firm. As the angle increased, they leaned farther forward, bringing their hands into play on the earth. Slowly they made progress. Then they were against the slide itself—and budding hope wilted. Feet and hands alike slipped downward at each upward draw; they gouged out hunks of slimy soil instead of rising.

A few minutes of dogged endeavor resulted only in smearing them with muck and forcing home the conviction that McKay's judgment had been only too sure. They ceased work and lay panting, conscious of a maddening weakness and despair, the offspring of heat and hunger.

Suddenly something thumped on the clay above them. Followed a slithering sound suggestive of a crawling snake. Then a serpentine shape seemed actually to take form on the soil—a dim, slender thing wriggling rapidly down at them. For a startled instant all started back from it. Then, with equal abruptness, Portonio threw himself upward, snatching at it with both hands. One big fist clutched it, and the other grabbed again, securing a double hold.

"*Cuerda!*" he muttered. "Rope!"

"Oh, boy!" exulted Tim, his voice surging out with unguarded force. "Now we'll——"

"Ssst!" hissed León. "Quiet, *por amor de Dios!*"

And from the face of the cliff fell a hoarse, vehement whisper:

"Shut up!"

Silence. The prisoners clamped their jaws, repressing all impulse to speak. The rope, slender but strong, twitched again as if its thrower were making sure that it had reached them. Then it strained taut. From above came another subdued prompting:

"One at a time!"

Portonio began hauling himself up, digging in his feet in long lifts while his hands reached for new grips. The others held their places. As the loose end of the rope fell behind the climbing riverman, Tim seized it; but, heedful of the last command, waited for the Venezuelan to reach the top. With his lips close to McKay's ear, he whispered:

"You win, Cap! White's come clean!"

The captain's teeth gleamed, but he made no reply. All eyes lifted again, watching the climbing figure above grow more and more indistinct. With difficulty they restrained a nagging urge to swarm up that rope in a body instead of awaiting their turns. Now that a line of exit was actually in their hands, the few minutes of enforced inaction seemed longer than all the blistering hours since morning.

Then, without warning, the rope fell slack. An alarmed grunt from Portonio—a sudden scuffing noise at the cave—a snarling gasp—the thud of a blow—all these blended. Almost instantly followed a heavier thump on the clay, succeeded by a sliding noise.

Out of the vagueness, rolling and bumping and slewing, came Portonio and another. At the sudden slackening of the line the Venezuelan had lost both his balance and his hold; and now, vainly clawing for a grip, he catapulted into his comrades, knocking them all to the bottom. Tim dropped the rope. Before they could right themselves, that rope jumped away, crawling swiftly back up the slide. And then the other tumbling body hit them.

They pounced on it. It lay inert—senseless or lifeless. Its face was indistinct, smeared with the miry substance of the chute. But there could be little doubt as to the identity of the new victim. Disfigured by muck and darkened by a darkness deeper than that of the night, yet the features were, on close scrutiny, discernible as those of a man born white. And, as the men whom he had tried to help released him and looked speechlessly at one another, from above croaked a voice all too familiar, and more hateful than ever before.

"The black white one would be white again. Turn him white, strangers!"

A fiendish chuckle. Then silence.

TO BE CONCLUDED

PRODIGAL STAR

by H. C. Montee

Author of "The Silver Lining."

DIXON flung out his hands in a deprecatory gesture. He was a big, ruddy-faced man, accustomed to handling horses and men, whose general bearing was not in keeping with such signals of helplessness. One would expect him to be able to take care of himself in almost any situation.

"I haven't any ideas, 'Lem.' That's the —— of it! Nobody seems to have any ideas. This bandit *hombre* just walks in and holds up a train whenever he feels like it, an' that's all there is to it.

"He's held up three in the past month. In every case the record's the same—lone bandit, big fellow masked to the eyes, walks into the front car, gun in both fists. He always says he ain't takin' money from women or children, and don't want any jewelry. He lines up the crowd facing the windows and relieves 'em. When he's finished all the cars he just naturally drops off the train while it's going lickety-split and disappears."

"He must leave some tracks to follow."

Lem Collins stared out of the window of the careening day coach as if he expected to pick up a trail through the sparse grass on the rolling sand hills which romped beside the track. Lem was undersized and bow-legged. He had a leathery face and eyes blue and hard and cold as gun steel. Long years of range riding had given him a habitual squint.

"Tracks! ——, he leaves plenty of tracks!" Dixon exploded. "Gus has rode the tails plumb off of half the horses in the state following them tracks. Gus and his men have found the horse the *hombre* rode each time. It's always a different one and sort of borrowed-like for the occasion.

"The first time Gus followed a trail as plain as day, clear up to the edge of the Goshen Hole country. He found the horse plumb rode out—a 2V-quarter circle brute—belongs to a gent named Swanson, a fat, squat fellow with a sort of angel face. But Swanson had been out on the shotgun roundup for a month and had an alibi for every minute.

"The next time, the *hombre* jumped off the train on Sherman Hill and rode one o' Old Man Sommerville's horses out at Granite. Sommerville was in Cheyenne that night, drunk. Gus was with him hisself about the time of the hold-up.

"The last time he rode a B-8 horse. They trailed him right up to the ranch buildings, but none o' the boys there had seen him, and there was no one at the ranch to tally with the description of the gent.

"That's the —— of it! It looks so plumb easy that Gus is goin' loco. The bandit gent appears to pick up and fly when he gets tired of leavin' a trail. Gus says he ain't never found so much as a boot-track to show where the bird got off the horse.

"Why don't you come down and see what you can make of it, Lem?" Dixon added half wistfully after his recital.

Collins jerked himself stiffly upright.

"Can't say as I'm over anxious," he drawled in a voice that was frosty. "You fellows down here fired me once. I don't allow to be fired again."

"Aw, ——!" protested his companion. "You ought to know by this time that was just a joke, Lem. We never thought you'd take it serious."

Dixon referred to an election some years previously when Lem Collins had been unseated as sheriff of the county and his brother Gus installed in his place. The incident came at the close of several strenuous years in office when Lem Collins was busy convincing itinerant punchers, would-be bad-men, and tourists, that the only tough place remaining in Laramie County was in the sheriff's office.

Gus Collins had been responsible. He undertook one night to paint the old town red, and Lem had locked him up. Cheyenne and the range land had enjoyed the joke immensely, and to carry it along some one had induced Gus to stand against his brother at the next election. The joke was perpetuated by electing Gus to fill Lem's place.

Every one had figured that Lem would sign on as Gus' deputy until the next election, when the county intended to reinstate him. But instead Lem drifted to the northern end of the county and hired out as a puncher. At the next election that section of the county voted to secede from the other sections and set itself up as Platte County. Lem Collins was elected and reelected sheriff of the new county.

Gus Collins, though little more than a boy, continued to hold down the sheriff's office in Laramie County, and there was a good deal of rivalry between the two counties on that account. Many of the old Laramie men believed that Lem had engineered the secession of the northern section, but that had never been proved.

"Gus is a good kid," Dixon continued, "but he ain't had the experience at this sort of thing that you have. We'd appreciate it, Lem, if you'd come down and tackle this thing, just for old times' sake."

Lem was obdurate.

"No, I reckon I wouldn't have any business coming down here and butting in on something that don't concern me. As long as that gent lets me alone and stays out o' Platte county, I reckon I'll let him alone."

"Aw—" Dixon started to protest, and then stopped short.

Collins felt his companion stiffen in his seat, and followed Dixon's stare to the front of the car.

"Well I'll be ——!" he swore softly as his hands went slowly above his head.

A tall man, lithely built, had entered the forward door. He wore a blue bandanna across the lower portion of his face, which completely hid his features, while his Stetson was pulled low over his eyes. In either hand he gripped a heavy automatic pistol, hammers drawn. He seemed to sway gently with the motion of the train.

"Hands up!" he called sharply. Most of the passengers had already assumed that position. "I'm not taking money from women or children," he continued. "I don't want your watches or jewelry, so don't bother to hide them. Stand up and face the windows! Everybody take hold of the luggage rack and keep your hands there. So! No monkey business now and we'll all be good friends."

DROPPING one of his guns into its holster, the bandit worked swiftly, passing from pocket to pocket, stuffing the loot he got into the front of his shirt. He was adept at his calling and seemed to know intuitively which pockets held the bills. He took no jewelry and did not go near the women passengers.

One woman looked as if she was about to scream. Her mouth opened and shut while her throat muscles worked spasmodically. The bandit caught her eye and favored her with a broad wink, whereupon the lady turned indignantly back to the window, all thought of screaming gone.

Dixon had obeyed orders by facing the window and grasping with both hands the luggage rack above his head. Collins, however, turned to observe the bandit at work, though he kept his hands elevated. He studied every move of the gunman.

"I can't reach that darned luggage rack," he explained soberly when his turn came; "that is, unless I stand up on the seat. I never could understand why they put them things up so darned high. Now I always gotta put my suitcase under the seat where my feet ought to go 'cause I can't boost it up on to one o' them racks without a ladder. It's a plumb outrage, I think."

"Face the window!" ordered the gunman, unsmiling. Then, "Wait a minute!"

He had noticed one point of the sheriff's star protruding from beneath Lem's coat lapel.

"Well, well," he exclaimed as he thrust back the coat and revealed the star. "We have with us a sheriff—a real live, loquacious little old sheriff too! Now aren't we lucky! And he has his lucky star with him and everything!"

The bandit was speaking loudly for the benefit of the other passengers. He jammed his gun close to Collins's stomach and with the other hand wrenched the star loose from Collins's vest.

"We'll just take his little star along," he continued in a loud voice, "and add it to our collection. Collecting stars is a hobby of mine."

"Ya, an' you'll be collecting stripes for a hobby pretty soon," Lem told him from between set teeth. "You'll probably get a whole suit of 'em at one throw. That's a lucky star for me, but it'll be a plumb unlucky one for you!"

It did not add to Lem's comfort to know that Dixon was laughing silently.

"Oh, if it doesn't bring me luck I'll send it back to you," the bandit promised airily.

"Never mind sending it. I'll come and get it personally," Lem told him. "I'm gonna see you again sometime, and I'll sure know ya."

He squinted hard into the shaded eyes.

"Just as you say." The bandit turned him around by a deft grip on the shoulder. "I'll see you in Rawlins sometime, maybe. Just say when."

Collins was sure the gunman laughed with the mention of the penitentiary town.

At the door of the car the bandit paused and jangled the keys he had taken from the conductor who was locked in the washroom of the smoker.

"Much obliged folks. Hope to see you all again some time. I'm locking this door so none of you will come back to the next car. They say there's a case of smallpox back there."

He closed the door, turned the key and was gone.

For a moment the car remained in silence except for the *clickety-click* of the rail joints. Then the passengers lowered their hands and raised their voices to an angry roar.

Collins gave no heed to his pockets. He had noted the sureness of the bandit's movements and was willing to take a good job for granted. He kicked a suitcase from beneath his seat and fished an old fashioned .45 from its depths.

"That *hombre* 'll see me in Rawlins—you're —— right he will!" Lem smiled crookedly as he snapped the cylinder out, spun the brass studded chambers and snapped it back. "He may see me there sooner than he expects."

Some of the other passengers had produced weapons from somewhere and a knot of these gathered at the locked door and pounded futilely against the steel panels. Lem slipped a handful of spare cartridges into a pocket and nodded to Dixon.

"That bird didn't lock the front door. Let's go up and stand on the steps and watch for him. Maybe we'll get a pot shot at him when he drops off."

They found the forward door unlocked, and, with the outside vestibule doors open, they took up positions on the steps at either side of the train.

"I see him, Lem!" Dixon shouted. "Gosh, he's away back on the last car. I couldn't hit a barn at that range. S'pose you try it!"

Collins scrambled over to the opposite steps. The bandit was down on the steps of the rear platform, eight coaches away, carefully choosing the ground for his leap. The limited was climbing the long eastern slope and was not making more than thirty miles an hour. As the bandit swung out from the steps Lem threw his six-gun forward and fired twice.

"No good," he grunted as the bandit dropped with studied looseness to the ground. "Throw my stuff off at Cheyenne, Dix, and tell Gus that I'm on this gent's trail."

Collins took one or two long jumps, turned a flying somersault and sat up, rubbing an elbow while waiting for the train to pass. Two hundred yards down the track the bandit had regained his feet and was striding rapidly toward three bald chalk buttes more than a mile out on the plain, which reared their weather-beaten heads above a triangular plateau stretching away back of them, and of which they were the apex.

Lem regained his feet and cut diagonally across the prairie at a dog trot to intercept the bandit. There was no shelter short of the buttes for either man. The sparse grass grew scarcely fetlock high, and here and there a lonesome soapweed raised its spiked head in isolation, but offered no protection.

"You better stop and look, doggone ya!" Lem grunted as the bandit shaded his eyes against the afternoon sun for a view of his pursuer.

W-h-a-m! W-h-a-m!

Lem's .45 roared out across the two hundred yards separating the two men his challenge to fight it out on even terms and in the open. He had allowed full sight for elevation, but the distance was too great for accurate shooting with a six-gun. The bandit ignored the challenge and broke into precipitate flight for the buttes.

"I s'pose he figgers he can hide in the rocks and pot me as I come up," Lem muttered. "Two of us can play hide an' seek in there, *hombre.*"

THE bandit reached the buttes a quarter of a mile ahead of Collins and disappeared up a narrow wind draw. Lem worked his way, more cautiously now, toward another opening three hundred yards to the west.

"He can't travel so fast in those rocks," Collins reasoned. "Once I get in there things will be evened up some—Ugh!"

Something cut the air so close to his cheek that he felt its hot breath. It was followed by the peculiar air-splitting report of a high-powered rifle. The little man hit the ground, face down, as if his legs had been knocked from beneath him.

"The —— —— had a rifle cached in there!" he swore. "—— him, he ain't no amateur. He had this place all figgered out ahead o' time."

He lay quiet for several minutes watching the face of the buttes. There was neither sound nor movement. Wriggling along on his stomach, much as a snake would travel, he started working his way toward the opening to the west.

Almost immediately the rifle in the rocks twanged again and a bullet tore up the sod between the little man's feet. Another struck a scant six inches from his face, throwing grass and sand into his eyes.

"That's —— good shooting," Collins admitted grudgingly. "He's just letting me know that he can plug me any time he takes the notion if I don't lay still. The sun'll be in his eyes pretty soon, though, and then I'll make a run for it."

The sun reached a position almost on a level with the grassland and sent its blinding rays in a flood of yellow glare over the rolling contour of the ground. Collins lifted himself slightly and moved forward. He would move cautiously until he ascertained what effect the sun had on the bandit's shooting.

S-p-a-n-g!

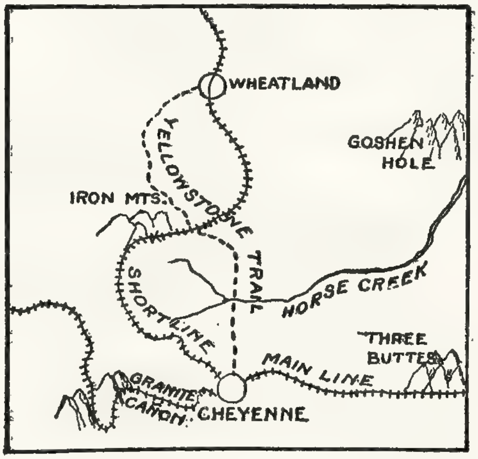
The answer from the rocks was instantaneous. To Collins' surprize, the rifle spat from the very opening for which he was working. Instead of shooting against the sun the bandit had worked around to a point where his target was in perfect light. Again the bullet tore up the ground just in front of the little man's face.

"Oh, ——!" Collins swore. "I guess that's notice that we camp right here until dark."

He rolled over on his back and made a cigaret.

The hour from sundown to dusk passed slowly. The cigaret burned down to the smoker's fingers and he carefully extinguished the butt in the dirt. There was no sound or movement from the rocks, but the man out on the plain could feel the steady, watchful eyes boring into him.

"He's probably back at his old stand by this time," Collins soliloquized. "That puts me against the skyline the minute I make a move—I wish he wasn't such a darned good shot."



Daylight gradually drained off the high ridge to the west until the dark shadow of the land and the lighter blue of the sky joined in a faintly visible line. It was dark enough by now to make shooting uncertain.

Collins gathered his feet under him and raced for the butte ahead. He ran twenty-five yards and dropped to the grass. There was no sound from the rocks. He sprinted again, this time not pausing until he reached the shadows of the tall rocks.

Once there, he picked his way cautiously toward the spot where the bandit had first entered the rocks. He was sure the bandit would have moved back there in order to keep his pursuer outlined against the skyline during the twilight. Gun in hand, Collins advanced from rock to rock, keeping always in the shadow. If there was to be an exchange of shots he desired a range of twenty-five yards or less.

He found that the bandit had chosen wisely in the selection of the buttes as a rendezvous. In addition to being a landmark which could not be mistaken, they offered excellent protection in case of pursuit. There were several covered retreats leading away from the place.

In the half-light Collins could see that the buttes had once been the point of a tableland projecting out into the plain. Centuries of seasonal windstorms, carrying with them torrents of cutting sand, had cut the buttes off from the supporting neck of plateau and had smoothed out a passageway between the outstanding rocks and the plateau itself.

A horseman leaving the buttes might go along under the northwest wall, or beneath the overhanging brow to the northeast; or he might make his way up a wind-draw to the top of the tableland and head directly north. All of the courses were well covered from sight of the plain, and led to the foothills country, where tracking would be difficult.

Collins figured he was about abreast of the wind-draw when a white spot in the dusk ahead caught his attention. He slid flat on his belly, gun ready, and watched the thing for some movement. It appeared to be stationary. Collins wriggled forward cautiously.

"Huh!" he ejaculated when he found it was the back of an old envelope fastened into the split end of a stick thrust into the ground. "The son of a gun has left a note for me and pulled out!"

By the light of a match he read the few words scrawled on the paper:

> Sorry I couldn't wait, Sheriff. Am in a hurry.
> See you in Rawlins.

"You're —— right you'll see me in Rawlins!" the little man grunted. "You're playin' a streak o' luck that's just about run out."

A search revealed that a horse had been left in the rocks for some hours. The bandit had even packed in a sack of hay for the horse, judging by the loose wisps lying about. Also, Collins found where the bandit had enjoyed a lunch while watching his pursuer out on the plain.

Collins licked his lips at this discovery and found that they were dry. He had had nothing to drink for many hours. But it was useless to attempt any further move before daylight, so he sought out a comfortable place to spend the night.

SHORTLY after sun-up he hailed a cavalcade which he rightly guessed to be Sheriff Gus Collins and a posse from Cheyenne. Gus was a younger edition of Lem, a red-faced, bow-legged, wiry little man. His greeting was as brief as his own stature.

"Hullo, Lem, how come?"

"'Lo, Gus. Howdy, boys. The son-of-a-gun had a horse and a rifle cached here, an' when I hoofed it out here after him, he kept me smellin' grass until dark. By that time he had drifted out. I found his horse's tracks this morning. He went northwest along the shoulder of that ridge."

"That guy ain't got no manners a-tall, has he, Gus?" asked a tall deputy of the group.

Jim Crandall held his deputy's commission because of his undisputed authority among the gamblers of the West End district. He sometimes gambled himself, for high stakes, and there had been insinuations that he was a "slicker," but he was a good deputy for keeping order in the "district" and Gus kept him on. Crandall had never liked Lem Collins since the latter's sheriffing days in Laramie.

"You'd think he might 'a' chose a time for his hold-up when there wasn't a sheriff from Platte County on the train," he continued soberly. "It was plumb thoughtless of him to go wavin' his gun around thataway and cause our neighborin' sheriff to jump off the train. He might 'a' knowed the folks from up Platte way ain't used to such carryings on. Now mightn't he, Gus?"

The other deputies, and even Gus, grinned. All of these men had known Lem Collins when he was sheriff of Laramie, and they enjoyed twitting him about the secessionist county to the north.

"Ain't that so," Lem drawled as he swung on to the horse which had been led out for him. "Up Platte County way folks are civilized. They ain't used to havin' a gun stuck under their noses every time they get on a train."

"My ——, fellas," Crandall broke in, "I wonder if he calls that cook-stove and galley that runs on the Short Line a train? Why, if the folks up his way ever saw a real train they'd have to hold a barbecue or somethin' so everybody could talk about it."

"Well, let's get a-going," Lem advised. "You might ride kinda easy if you jump that guy. He's a plumb good shot."

But the posse did not jump the bandit, though they rode hard throughout the day with only a brief stop at noon to wind their mounts. They followed a plain trail along under the brow of the bluff until the plateau rolled out with the surrounding country.

At the right bank of Horse Creek the trail swung due west, following the general course of the stream. But for the deep hoof-prints which told of a horse hard ridden, the trail was that of a rider for pleasure.

At the Horse Creek bridge the bandit had swung into the Yellowstone Trail, headed directly for Cheyenne.

Gus Collins swore viciously, for here the tracks disappeared. The bandit had evidently struck into the road during the early hours of the morning, and it was now late afternoon. The posse had ridden well over sixty miles in that time and their horses were jaded. While they were doing those sixty miles the usual traffic on the Yellowstone Trail had completely obliterated the record of the bandit's movements.

"We'd just as well hit for Cheyenne," Lem advised. "You can't tell where that —— went from here. He might 'a' rode south a few steps and then backtracked to the north, and he might 'a' gone right into town. He knew darned well his tracks would be wiped out before we found 'em. Tomorrow we'll sort of fan out and see if we can raise his wind anywhere."

It was long past dark when the dust-covered posse reached Cheyenne, but they found Dixon, who ran the livery stable which furnished the sheriff's office with horses, waiting for them at the corral. He was riding a high horse.

"I been expectin' you fellows," he announced belligerently to Gus as the posse rode up. "I want to know who in —— rode that buckskin of yours in from the ranch last night. That horse needed a rest, after the way you've been a-ridin' him all over ——'s half acre. That's what I sent him out to the ranch for. And in less'n a week somebody fans him into town as if he was one of them automobiles."

Gus looked blankly at Lem.

"None of us rode him," he announced. "We're still ridin' what's left of the nags you gave us when we started."

"Well, somebody sure rode him! Take a look at him yourself. He's plumb ruined for three months."

Dixon led the way to a stall where the buckskin, Gus' own and favorite mount, stood staring dejectedly into an empty manger. Though he had rolled in the corral and had stood all day, he still bore traces of lathered sweat on his yellow coat. His sides still were gaunt and his eyes dull from the hard riding he had received.

"When did he come in?" asked Lem.

"I dunno. Some time last night," Dixon answered. "He was standin' in the corral when I came in this morning. He'd been rolling in the corral but he was still wet and about all in."

"Looks like that was the horse we've been following all day."

Lem nodded to his brother. Gus' swollen throat was incapable of speech just then. The best he could do was to spit savagely at the floor. Lem smiled crookedly.

"Sure is gettin' to be the limit when a hold-up bird rides the sheriff's own horse to make his getaway. It's what them lawyer fellows would call a travesty of justice."

THAT night Gus and Lem went into conference.

"It sure looks like that guy has the Indian sign on me," Gus admitted mournfully. "He walks in and sticks up a train when he needs some cash, and then takes his pick of the horses in the country to ride away on. He leaves a trail just so long as he wants to leave one, and after that there ain't no more sign than as if he had flew away. It has me plumb hoodooed."

"It ain't a hoodoo," his brother corrected. "He just has you outsmarted, that's all.

"There is one sure thing about this deal. That bird is using Cheyenne as his headquarters. Every one of his hold-ups has been within fifty miles of here, some east, some west. This seems to be the betwixt and between place. Also, he seems to know just about what you are doing all the time. His stealing your buckskin to ride for this last job shows that."

"Aw, ——, that ain't a clue. Everybody in town knows what I am doing most of the time."

"Then it's time somebody wasn't so well informed," Lem said with a yawn. "Well, I'm going to mosey down to West End and see the sights. Coming?"

"No. I'm going to check up at all the barns and see if any stranger took a horse out of here about sunup this morning. That fellow must have left his own nag here, somewhere."

Before going to the West End district Lem Collins made a round of all the garages in town, checking up on the out-of-town cars which had been in town the day and night before. At a small establishment on the edge of the "district" he thought he picked up a trail. The man who ran the place knew Lem and answered questions readily.

"What kind of a layout are you lookin' for?" he asked.

"S'pose you give me a general description of any strangers that left a car here for the last two or three days," the Platte County sheriff countered, "an' I'll decide whether they fit in with what I want. Swapping descriptions never did me any good. I always get the worst of it. You do the talking, I'll listen."

The garage man described several out-of-town cars and their owners.

"Then there is a Colorado car comes in here once in a while," he added. "I can't say as it is a stranger, though. It's been here four of five times in the last six weeks and always stays a coupla days. There's a girl drives it always, and there's a big fellow with her—husband I guess.

"The guy always hits for the West End—and gets roarin' drunk. After he's had his spree the girl gets him and takes him home. He's a big guy, kinda slim, and has brown eyes, I think. She's a pretty good chunk of a girl, but not bad looking.

"They left here this morning right after breakfast, and the guy sure looked as if he'd been on one awful tear—bleary-eyed and dirty, and he hadn't had a shave in many a day."

"Uhuh," the sheriff grunted. "Next time they come just tip me off. I'm gonna take a look at that big guy."

At the "Palace of Light" he found Jim Crandall deep in a game where stakes were high and the pace swift. Crandall looked little the worse for his seventy-mile ride that day, and played with a steady hand. Collins watched the game in silence for a time.

"Playin' them pretty high tonight ain't you, Jim?" he inquired while the dealer was shuffling the cards.

Crandall laughed shortly.

"Just as well blow my wad this way as any, Lem. It ain't safe to have money around here any more when any —— fool can hold up a train what has a sheriff guardin' it; take the sheriff's money and star, and then ride another sheriff's horse right into the man-hunter's office while a whole posse of other —— fools is ridin' their heads off after him."

A roar of laughter from the surrounding tables held Collins to silence for a time.

"I guess you're right, Jim. Any —— fool might do a stunt like that," was his parting shot.

LEM COLLINS drummed his brother's desk with idle fingers. It was two weeks since the hold-up and people had almost ceased to speak of it—except in the sheriff's presence. Gus and his deputies were out—somewhere, and Lem was holding down the office.

Lem's own theory had not worked out. The Colorado car had been to town twice since the hold-up and both times the garage man had telephoned its arrival. Lem had shadowed the big man who came in it, and he appeared to be what the garage man had said he was. He came to town to get dog-drunk, and did so. Then the woman took the sodden mass back to Colorado.

Collins watched a powerful yellow racing car slide to a stop in front of the office. Lem knew the car, as did almost every traveler between Denver and the Yellowstone Park, and he considered it the most dangerous thing in the country. It belonged to Jim Crandall, who claimed for his car all the speed records of the west. Crandall and his "Yellow Devil" were the most feared objects on the mountain roads.

The telephone jarred into the vacancy of Lem's thoughts. It was the garage man again. The Colorado car had just arrived, he said, but only the girl was in it. He supposed she had left the man in some saloon down-town.

He had scarcely hung up the receiver when the thing rang again. This time it was the foreman of the JO ranch at Iron Mountain. One of the saddle string was missing. Of course it might be, and probably was, that the horse had just strayed from the bunch, but Gus had asked all the ranches in the country to keep a close tab on their riding stuff, and to notify the sheriff's office at once if any horse turned up missing. The boys were riding the hills looking for the cayuse, and if they found it the foreman would telephone again.

"Hey, Jim," Collins shouted to Crandall, who was still seated in his car looking over some of the dashboard dials, " 'j'know where Gus and the boys would be about this time?"

"Gus ought to be out around old man Sommerville's place about noon," Crandall answered. "Olson went east this morning, but I think you ought to be able to find him around Durham somewhere. Why?"

"The JO just telephoned in that one of their saddle string is missing. Of course it might 'a' strayed off, and then again it mightn't. If we can get hold of the boys, we'll throw a sort of line along the road east and west of here, and if that hold-up jasper pulls any of his work today we'll see if we can't give him a surprize."

"How long has the JO bronc been missing?"

"I dunno. They just noticed it this morning."

Crandall laughed.

"That bandit sure has this country running in circles if every ranch in the country is going to telephone to the sheriff every time one of its horses strays off the range. Looks like this office is going to be plumb busy from now on."

Collins was riled.

"If it's such a —— funny joke, why don't you put that powerful head of yours to work catching the *hombre?* You're a part of the sheriff's office."

"Yea, but I'm just a deputy," Crandall answered lazily. "I'm not paid to do the heavy thinking. I obey orders and get shot at, that's all."

"Well, it looks as you might get plenty o' chances to get shot at before long," Collins promised him, turning back to the telephone.

AT NOON the JO foreman telephoned again that the boys had been unable to find any trace of the stray. Shortly after that Lem had reached both Gus and Olson by telephone and given them the information.

Men from the ranches joined the sheriff's forces and by late afternoon a long line of heavily-armed men patrolled the railroad for fifty miles east and west of Cheyenne. Station agents were notified and trainmen warned that another hold-up was possible.

Through the long afternoon and early evening Lem Collins and Jim Crandall sat in the dumpy office and waited. Collins waded through the pages of a magazine thriller while Crandall smoked innumerable cigarets, the butts of which he flecked out through the open door.

"Looks like you had overguessed this time, Lem," Crandall grinned. "There ain't any more big trains through now until midnight, and all of the hold-ups so far have been in the day time.

"Guess I'll go and get some supper. I'm darned glad I'm not one of the boys riding up and down the track, anyway."

"Bring me in some sandwiches and a pail of coffee—wait a minute!" as the telephone rang again.

"—— what's that? Yea, this is Collins. What? The Short Line? Two shot! The mines' payroll, eh? Ya, all right."

Collins whirled on Crandall, who stood gaping at the telephone.

"I didn't overguess that time. I underguessed. The Short Line's 7:10 was held up between Iron Mountain and Diamond. The mines' payroll was on it and the two guys guarding the roll was both shot. The —— fools at the mine office here never said a word to us about sendin' the payroll on that train. Here we've been patrollin' the main line all day! He probably caught both them guards asleep— Oh ——"!

Crandall thought for a moment.

"The quickest way we could get there would be to go to Diamond in my car and get horses from there. Gus and the boys are out of it. It would take them too long to get together."

"We ain't goin' nowhere, at least not yet awhile," asserted Lem testily. "Payson and the boys from Wheatland are pounding down toward Diamond now, and they can get there quicker than we could. They are just as good at trailin' too. We'll just sit tight here for a while.

"Go get your supper, and keep a tight head about this. Bring me in some sandwiches and coffee when you come."

When Crandall had gone Collins called the garage again.

"Let me know when that Colorado car gets ready to move," he instructed. "You might let the air out of a tire or something to keep her there until I can get around."

Crandall returned with the coffee and sandwiches. He smoked nervously while Collins ate.

"——, it seems like we ought to be doin' something," he broke out at last. "We can't just sit here and do nothing!"

"We'll do something when the time comes," Lem promised between gulps. "You might be gettin' the rifles and puttin' on your six-gun. I got a hunch we'll be movin' soon."

Crandall obeyed, but sullenly. He pumped the shells from the magazines and reloaded them. Then he handed Lem a cartridge belt and six-gun while he buckled another around his own hips.

Presently the telephone rang. Lem was on top of it at once.

"Yea, all right. I'll be right around in Jim's racer. Let it go as soon as you see us coming. So long."

He turned to Crandall.

"Grab your gun, boy. We're off!"

"Where to?"

"Dunno yet. Drive around to Benning's garage, as if we was goin' to take gas and oil."

"I don't need any gas or oil. What's the idea?"

"Dunno yet," Lem returned doggedly. "We'll see when we get there."

As the yellow racer turned into the street by the garage a big maroon touring car, with the top down, backed out of the garage and headed north.

"Slide in as if we was going to take gas," Collins directed, "but don't stop." He reached down and turned off the lights. "Keep right behind that maroon car, but don't get too close—and close that —— cutout!"

The big car, visible now only in outline behind the two wide streams of light tearing into the night, shot west along the avenue leading to the State capitol, made the turn on two wheels and roared out of town on the Yellowstone Trail. The yellow racer easily maintained its place, shooting through the dark without a light and silent except for the low thrumming of the powerful motor.

"I don't like this rambling along without any lights," Crandall complained. "We'll smash into something first thing we know. If you want to catch that car just say so and I'll run over it in a mile."

"I don't want to catch it—yet," Collins answered. "I just want to know where it is going and what it is going to do when it gets there. We can catch it later."

"Do you know how fast we're going, without lights?"

"No, and I don't want to know. You just keep driving, son, and I'll do the worrying about how fast we're going."

THEY had reached the series of hogbacks on the north road by this time and were obliged to cut their speed somewhat, as the touring car did not take the steep hills with the ease of the racer. The driver had opened the cutout now and the roar of the laboring motor drifted back to the men in the racer.

"Horse Creek at the bottom of the next hill, Jim," Collins reminded. "Bridge sets sort of squeegee on the road, so hit her easy-like."

For answer Crandall leaned forward and switched on the lights. Two incandescent streams spewed forth on to the road, lighting it up like day.

With an oath Lem wrenched the switch around, turning off the light. He was glad the touring car had already dropped the hill and could not have seen the lights.

"What the —— do you want to do; advertise that we're coming?" Collins demanded.

"I don't intend dropping down the other side of this hill goin' —— for leather in the dark, with Horse Creek bridge at the bottom!" Crandall retorted. "I ain't gone plumb crazy yet."

"You can slow up some then," Collins conceded, "but if you turn on them lights again I'll bend my six-gun over your —— head."

Without slackening his speed Crandall dropped down the hill, negotiated the crooked bridge, tore across the little valley and up the hill at the other side. Collins did not realize the speed they were making until the racer topped the hill and he saw the lights of the touring car just flattening out in the valley at the bottom of the hill. He reached out with his foot and found the brake.

"Easy, Jim, don't lose your head. We'll just sort of slide down this one and give her a chance to get up that next hill. We don't want to get too close."

Crandall said nothing, but gradually the racer narrowed the gap between the two cars, until the touring car at the top of the hill was less than two hundred yards ahead of the racer just taking the grade.

Then the roar of the racer's exhaust nearly bounced Collins off his seat. He kicked at the cutout valve twice before he found it and silenced the roar. Then his left hand stole quietly downward until it found Crandall's holster. Collins unsheathed the weapon with a jerk and pressed it into the deputy's side.

"I don't like to think it, Jim, but that's too many breaks to be accidental. The next time I'm gonna plug you."

He shifted the gun to the small of Crandall's back.

"There, that's better. Now if we bump anything, or if something happens to us, I'll get you as I go."

Twenty-five miles out of Cheyenne the touring car swung off the Yellowstone Trail to a wagon road angling across the open country. The racer slowed down to give the other car plenty of lead.

"That's a cut-off," Collins announced. "It joins the trail again about five miles northwest of here. That girl sure seems to know her way about here."

Crandall grunted, but said nothing. With that gun pressing into his back, all of his attention was given to driving.

Suddenly the touring car swung off the road altogether and headed slowly across the open prairie. The racer followed cautiously. Driving without lights now was a big handicap. The big car could dodge stones, soapweed and washouts, but Crandall could see none of these things and had to take his chances. Collins was puzzled by the actions of the car ahead until its lights picked out the walls of a vacant house. Then he swore softly.

"By —— I was right after all! It *is* a rendezvous. We've got 'em this time, Jim!

"Swing over to the north there and stop your motor before she stops hers—no, leave it running a little, but cut it away down—that's it. No false moves now, Jim. Don't step on that cut-out again or I'll just naturally plug you right where you sit!"

"Aw, what the —— do you think I'm—" Crandall began.

"I dunno, Jim," Collins cut in. "I hope not, but you made one or two pretty bad breaks back there a piece, and I'm too close to winning a big pot now, to take a chance.

"We'll just wait here," he continued in a low voice. "She's gonna stop alongside that old Buel house and I got a hunch that when she leaves there'll be some one with her. The fella will have the mines' payroll with him."

Collins took the two rifles and slipped to the back of the car. There, lying on his belly, his feet braced against the spare tire rack, he found an excellent position for shooting. He was sure there was going to be a fight.

Half an hour passed. Crandall grew restless.

"Can't I get out and stretch my legs, Lem?" he asked. He was beginning to feel jumpy because of the feel of Collins' gun pressing into the back of his neck.

"Nope. I figger we won't have much longer to wait. You will get plenty of chance to stretch your legs when this is over."

Out of the darkness came the grind of a self-starter thrown into gear. In a moment the lights of the other car swished in a wide circle as the car headed again for the road.

"All right, Jim," Collins whispered. "Go get 'em. You can turn on your lights now and burn up the road. Better wait until we hit the road before you try any speed, though.

"You're about due to get that chance of bein' shot at," he added softly.

THE racer bounced forward with a jerk and in a moment the two powerful lights held the car ahead in the warmth of their glare. There were two people in the car and both turned with a surprized stare at the lights which had sprung up out of the blackness of the prairie.

"Easy, Jim," Collins counseled as the racer gathered speed. Let 'em make the road. I don't think he can hit us at that range, shooting into the light."

This last was offered as the man in the car ahead pushed something that gleamed over the back of the seat. Collins was mistaken, however. At the spurt of red from the rifle the small windshield of the racer shattered back on to Crandall and Collins. The racer dipped sharply to the right and just missed turning over on a large boulder.

"——, I hate to shoot with a woman in that car!" Collins gritted in his companion's ear. "But if that *hombre* cuts loose again I'll take a chance at him. ——, that was a close one!"

The rifle ahead had winked fire again and the bullet struck the curving cowl of the racer, ricochetted upward over the heads of the two men and whined off into the night.

Both cars were in the cut-off road now and increased their speed. The riding was much smoother, which made for more accurate shooting. The bandit had a disadvantage in shooting against the blinding glare of the racer's lights and he could not see either of his targets.

Collins saw the rifle barrel glint over the tonneau again. He aimed two feet below the rifle and fired twice. Then the bandit's rifle streaked flame.

This time he landed a direct hit on one of the racer's headlights and the two in the racer heard the glass shatter to the road. The bullet had missed the bulb, however, and the light somewhat dimmed by the shattered reflector, still served its purpose.

The bandit fired again, his bullet striking into the radiator with a soft thud. Collins was firing at regular intervals, but could not tell what effect his bullets had. He was missing the bandit, anyway. He turned his aim to the rear tires of the other car, plainly visible in the streaking headlights. At the first shot the red tail-light of the other winked out.

"Huh! Missed by two feet!" he grunted. "Hey, Jim, stop quick! There's the main road and I'll get a couple of broadside shots at 'em."

Before the racer had come to a stop Collins was on the ground, waiting for the touring car to make the turn into the Yellowstone Trail. The driver took the turn at forty miles an hour and must have all but turned the big car over.

Collins was shooting at a slight angle, and he led the car by a foot. His first shot knocked the near headlight into darkness. The second struck somewhere in the neighborhood of the hood. He was shooting more to disable the other car than to hit one of the bandits. The third time he pulled the trigger the hammer fell on a flat firing pin. He had emptied his rifle.

He swore savagely as he yanked shells from his belt, running toward the spot where the racer had stopped.

Crandall heard the empty rifle. He dropped in his clutch and fed the racer gas. It shot forward with a bound. At the same time Crandall threw himself sidewise in the seat to get his body below the shielding curve of the low seat.

Collins was less than thirty feet away, running. He threw his six-gun from its holster and fired with the same motion at the dark curve of Crandall's shoulder which he had not succeeded in getting below the back of the seat.

"Stop, Jim! By ——, I'll kill you!" he called.

He fired again at the bulging back.

The racer stopped, the brakes set so hard that the rear wheels slid. Collins picked up his rifle and ran to the car.

"That's your third break, Jim. By ——! It's your last. I'm——"

"——, you winged me, Lem. Twice, I think," Crandall said thickly.

"You had it comin'," Collins told him. "Let's see where I hit you."

He ran his hand over Crandall's back until he came to the shoulder where both his bullets had struck. It was already wet with blood.

" 'S'all right. You just got a busted shoulder. You're lucky it wasn't your —— head that was stickin' up for me to shoot at. You're just a plumb —— fool!"

"I can't drive now, Lem. This——"

"I can; shove over. Now listen, Jim," he went on as he slid under the racer's wheel and placed his rifle between his knees, while Crandall's rifle was thrust between his leg and the side of the car away from his companion, "I'm gonna catch those birds. You'd better get down under the dashboard and stay there. Keep your good hand on the side where I can see it. The first —— move you make I'm gonna bend a gun over your head. *Sabe?*"

Collins was not an expert driver. He had acquired his sole experience behind a steering wheel on a few isolated trips with an amiable Ford. But he had nerve and a cool head. After all, those are the principal requisites of a speed demon.

The yellow racer answered with the best it had. It roared up the first hogback at fifty miles an hour, still gaining momentum. Down the other side, across the valley and up the next hill, the yellow car seemed scarcely to touch the ground, except at the start of the grade, when Lem felt a sinking sensation, as if he were settling through the bottom of the seat. He topped the next hill at a speed that caused the car to leave the ground for a few paces, and slid down the other side like a rush of wind.

The touring car was nowhere in sight. For once Lem Collins was grateful for the wire fences that lined either side of the road. The big car ahead had no choice but to go straight on, until it passed Horse Creek Bridge, and Collins was sure he would overtake it before then.

AT THE top of the next hogback he saw the lights of his quarry on the ridge ahead of him. The bandits were making good time, but he was making even better. At risk of life he pushed the accelerator down to the floorboards and the yellow streak put on a fresh burst of speed. Collins was glad it was dark, so that he could not see how fast the country was flitting past him.

How he negotiated the angle of the bridge across Horse Creek he did not know, but he did it. He gained the top of that hill to find the bandit car less than a mile away. They, too, had put on fresh speed.

When they reached the outskirts of the city the two cars were less than three hundred yards apart and the bandit in the rear seat was shooting methodically into the racer's radiator. Collins could smell his heating motor. The bandit was slowly draining the racer's radiator. Collins wondered if the bandits hoped to lose him by sudden turns through the city streets.

But that was not the intention. The big car smashed through town, swerved sharply to the right, negotiated the turn on two wheels and flattened out along the road to Granite Cañon in a race for the Colorado border.

Collins with the lower car gained fifty yards on the turn. In the next half mile he gained another fifty yards. His motor was thoroughly hot now and was not doing its maximum speed. He did not know until afterward that Crandall had put on the hand-brake by a light pressure with his knee.

The sheriff threw his rifle forward over the cowl for a shot at the leader's tires, but decided his six-gun would do better. He could not handle the rifle well with one hand because of the bouncing of the car. Also, he realized that the flash of his gun would furnish the marksman ahead with something to shoot at. He decided to wait.

Another mile and he had cut the distance to a hundred yards. His radiator and hood now were in a cloud of steam and it was only a question of a mile or two until he would begin to lose speed. The bandit was shooting into the steam, but so far his bullets were only ricochetting off the cowl.

Collins steered to the left side of the road so that the inner wheel of the leading car was directly in front of him. Then he threw his six-gun over the edge of the cowl and fanned the hammer.

W-h-a-m! W-h-a-m! W-h-a-m!

The last shot was answered by a tearing *w-h-r-e-e-w!* that told of a direct hit. The big car lurched badly and slackened speed. The bandit lost some of his caution and stood boldly up in the tonneau and pumped lead at the flashes of Collins' gun.

The sheriff let go the wheel and fired at the figure. He saw the bandit crumple up in the seat and heard the brakes of the forward car grind. His own car ate up the intervening distance like fire running down a powder train. He reached for the steering wheel, but had only time to grasp it when the yellow car plowed into the other like a mad bull that has run its quarry to earth.

The steering wheel struck Collins in the chest and drove the breath from his body. For a moment the two cars and strange lights rushed around in fantastic circles. Then he saw a woman's form climbing out of the front seat of the other car.

"Stick 'em up, lady!" he called to her. "I've gotta take you in."

The answer was a red stab from a .45.

"You —— little vixen!" Collins yelled.

He leaped out of the seat into the shadow beside the two cars. He listened for the sound of retreating footsteps, but heard none. Cautiously he moved around behind the car to the opposite side. The woman was creeping toward him, gun in hand. Collins had the advantage because she was between him and the headlight of the forward car, which she had forgotten to turn off.

"——, I hate to shoot at a woman!" the sheriff grumbled to himself, hesitating.

Just then Crandall raised up from the seat of the racer, a rifle in his good arm, and threw a leg over the side. The woman fired at him point blank, and from the way Crandall disappeared Collins could not be sure whether he was hit or had ducked. The woman half turned toward the car and Collins ran under her gun hand, jamming his own gun into her waist.

"Drop it!" he commanded tersely.

He got out his handkerchief with which to tie her hands, but when he had grasped one wrist he stopped.

"Come on up to the light!" he commanded, prodding her in the small of the back with his weapon.

IN THE glare of the one headlight he jerked off the woman's Stetson hat. Then he gave a tug at the dark mass of hair and it came away with his hand, leaving the close-clipped head of a man, and a man's face. Where a moment before the face had been entirely feminine, it was now wholly masculine.

"Well, I'll be ——!" Collins swore. "So that's it!"

The thud of galloping horses interrupted them. In a moment Gus Collins, Dixon, three deputies and some cowboys galloped into the light and drew rein. They were on their way to town from their long vigil along the main line and had been attracted by the smash of the two cars and the shooting. They had not heard of the hold-up of the Short Line.

"Hold this he-female," Lem directed some of the surprized men. "There's a couple 'a' fellows shot back there."

With Gus' help he dragged the wounded bandit into the light. The man was shot in the chest, but a cursory examination convinced those about him that he would live. He was barely conscious. From a satchel in the tonneau they also took the mine's payroll.

"——," Collins exclaimed suddenly, "I plumb forgot Jim! He's in the back car."

They found Crandall still in the racer, unhurt, except for the wounds he had received from Collins. He had not been hit by the second bandit's shot. He cringed somewhat as they led him into the light.

The skirted bandit started as he recognized Crandall. Then he made a swinging kick at the deputy's face.

"You?" he demanded savagely. "You —— double-crosser! I'm glad I got you once, anyway!"

"You didn't," Lem reminded the bandit. "I done that. You missed him clean."

Then, to the expressions of surprize about him, he explained:

"There's your combination. That's why you couldn't ever catch these *hombres*. Jim here furnished the broncs for this *hombre* to ride, and hid 'em away at appointed places. This he-woman drove the car and waited at the rendezvous, and this guy did the work.

"Jim was always alibied; nobody thought anything about the woman, and nobody could catch the other guy. It was sure a good combination."

"Good work, Lem. How'd you figger it out?" There was nothing but admiration in his brother's voice.

"I didn't figger Jim in on it until he got so plumb reluctant to trail this he-woman. Then when he tried to ditch me I had to shoot him. About this car—I figgered the only way this *hombre* could get away from where he left his horse, so far out o' town every time, and not leave any trail a-tall, was in a car.

"I checked up and found this car had been in town every time there was a hold-up. So I just laid for it. I was about to give it up as a bum steer, when it came to town today at about the time of the hold-up on the Short Line. When Benning told me that the woman drove in alone, I got suspicious again.

"I got Jim and we just followed this he-woman to where it picked up the other guy. We been a-fighting and a-running ever since."

The little sheriff stooped over and went through the wounded bandit's pockets.

"Ugh!" he grunted with satisfaction as he straightened up, a sheriff's star in his hand.

He rubbed the tarnished emblem on his trouser's leg before pinning it to his vest.

"I told that bird this would be a plumb unlucky star for him to collect. He's about due to do some stripe collectin' now, and I reckon I'll see him in Rawlins while he's doing it. He'll be there quite a stretch, I reckon."

THE JUDAS OF THE FIRST TEXAN EXPEDITION TO SANTA FÉ

by **Arthur Woodward**

DISASTER dogged the footsteps of the First Texan Expedition to Santa Fê, organized in 1841 by General Mirabeau Lamar, president of the new Republic of Texas, from the day it set forth from Austin, the capital city, until the morning of September 17, when it was betrayed into the hands of the Mexican forces by Captain William P. Lewis, commander of the Texan artillery company.

The motive for the expedition was the annexation of that portion of the province of New Mexico lying upon the eastern or Texan side of the Rio Grande. Peaceful persuasion by oratory and handbills was to be tried, but if the inhabitants refused to rebel against the Mexican government in Santa Fé, then the party was to dispose of its stock of trade and quietly retire to Texas.

Accompanying the traders' caravan of Conestoga wagons was a military escort of three hundred men under the command of General McLeod. The artillery company boasted one brass six-pounder.

As the country through which they were traveling was unknown to the Texans, a detachment of one hundred men under the command of Colonel William G. Cooke was sent ahead to make a reconnaisance and discover the whereabouts of the Mexican settlements.

This party left the main body on the thirty-first of August and arrived within eighty miles of San Miguel when a small party, consisting of Major George Howard, Captain Lewis, Mr. Fitzgerald, Mr. Van Ness and Mr. George Wilkins Kendall, was ordered ahead to report the advance of the Texans and make arrangements for food and forage, articles which the men and animals of the expedition needed badly.

News of the "Texan invasion" had already reached Santa Fé and Governor Manuel Armijo sent out a troop of cavalry under the command of the notorious Dimasio Salezar who promptly arrested the five men of the scouting company at the small town of Cuesta not far from San Miguel.

The day after their arrest, Governor Armijo himself arrived with one thousand men, and it was at this first meeting with the blustering tyrant of Santa Fé that Captain Lewis showed signs of cowardice which later caused his name to be a byword for treachery among the Texans.

Armijo, seeing the calibre of the man with whom he was dealing, agreed to give him his liberty and reward him, if he would turn traitor and induce the Texan soldiers to surrender peaceably.

Lewis eagerly agreed to this and although his brothers-in-arms were unconscious of his perfidy at the time, subsequent actions of the arch-traitor proved beyond a doubt that he was "*sin verguenza*" and a coward through and through.

Acting under instructions from Armijo, Captain Lewis persuaded Colonel Cooke to surrender his command to the Mexican forces without firing a shot, when had the truth been known, the Texans might have been able to dominate the situation and would have saved the lives of those who were later wantonly shot in cold blood.

Colonel Cooke surrendered at Anton Chico at ten-thirty in the morning, September 17, 1841. Nearly a month later General McLeod, and the remainder of the Texans were taken prisoners under the same false statements and misrepresentations of the number of Mexicans under arms, made by Lewis.

On the sixteenth of October, Lewis left San Miguel a free man while his comrades were driven like so many sheep to Mexico City. In Santa Fé the foreign residents gave Lewis to understand his company was not wanted. He left secretly for his old home in Chihuahua but was met with the same cool reception at that city by his former friends and acquaintances.

He braved their scorn for a day then fled west to the Pacific Coast and sailed from Guyamas to the Sandwich Islands. Later he embarked for Valparaiso under an assumed name and was never heard of again. Such is the brief tale of a man whom his betrayed comrades termed "the Judas of the nineteenth century."

THIEVES' HONOR

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "Black Ivory," "Jinx," etc.

FENWICK—the pock-marked, one-eyed keeper of the Turtle Tavern on Tortuga, favorite resort of the buccaneers who formed the floating population and main support of that island, nominally under command of its French governor—surveyed his questioner keenly and in none too sympathetic fashion with his single, glittering optic; then turned upon him the black patch that covered an empty socket. A shrewd man, Fenwick, a buccaneer himself before he turned tavern-master on account of a pike-thrust between the ribs that still bothered him.

He did not like the look of this man Da Costa, who inquired for "Long Tom" Davis with a swagger, a bravado and a blustering tone that were none of them, to Fenwick, altogether the real thing. The chap was a "Portygee" to begin with and Portuguese, in Fenwick's estimation, were too close to the hated Spanish; for all their protestations and their recently acquired independence, to be considered as comrades. The Turtle Tavern was a cosmopolitan place catering to the mixed fellowship that made up the Brotherhood of the Coast; men from the American colonies, Britishers from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales; Frenchmen, Scandinavians, Italians, Danes and runaway Maroons. Fenwick himself was a burly, red-faced Englishman who sold good liquors and prided himself upon his judgment of his customers, as a man needs who trusts buccaneers out of luck.

Da Costa, with his loud mouth and his shifty eyes, did not appeal to him, quite apart from his personality. He continued to give him the disfavor of his half-turned shoulder and his black patch while he bawled for a potboy above the uproar of maudlin song, whining fiddles and the rough talk of the big room, with its tables set about the sanded floor, cleared a little in the middle for dancing. After all, it was the affair of Long Tom Davis and that gentleman, originally from the Carolinas, was well capable of looking out for himself.

The harried, overworked lad came at his master's call. A buccaneer, in tipsy humor, stuck out a booted foot and sent the boy sprawling with his load of empty pewter tankards. Those nearest guffawed as the boy sat up, reaching for the pots. Fenwick came through a narrow alley, closed by a lifting counter slab, with a bellow, shaking a finger in the jester's face.

"You leave my help alone, you soused scatterwit! That, or out the Turtle you go and stay there. You drunken sea-louse, you fat-bellied sot, who's to pay for the dented pewter?"

The man gasped at the tirade, good-natured at first, then with a scowl and a move toward the butt of the pistol that was thrust between sash and belt. Fenwick's big hand shot down like the strike of a hawk and, clamping the other's wrist, twisted it upward.

"Threaten me, will ye? Show pistol to Harry Fenwick in his own house? Up and out wi' ye! Up!"

With a prodigious show of strength he yanked the joker to his feet, kicked them out from under him as his left hand grasped collar, dragging his helpless freight to the door while the room, crowding close, applauded with mugs thundered on the tables, with shouts and laughter. Fenwick came back growling.

"Some day I'll burst my wound over a fool like that but, blast me, I'll run my house to suit me."

And he glared at Da Costa as he swung on the yawping potboy.

"Go find Long Tom Davis. He's aloft in the rear chamber. Tell him there's one to talk with him—in private. The name's Da Costa. Is that the message?

"Tell him it eez verree important. That I come a verree longa way to breeng the word," said Da Costa, visibly impressed by the exhibition of Fenwick's prowess.

The boy went off on his errand. The tavern door opened and the crestfallen jester reappeared.

"Here's a gold piece to mend the pots," he said placatingly.

He knew that Fenwick was a prime favorite with all the buccaneers on Tortuga, who would resent slight or damage to an old comrade. Moreover, the Turtle was the best of the taverns, and he was enamored of one of the girls who made light love to the sea bullies and traded kisses for eight-real *pesos-duros*. He spoke with a sheepish grin, eager to buy his peace.

Fenwick, mollified at the sight of the gold—perhaps his original intent achieved—took the coin, spun it and caught it with a laugh.

"Prime solder to mend all hurts," he said. "There's a jot of good rum to thee in change. I'll join ye, to show there's no ill feeling."

LONG TOM DAVIS sprawled in a great chair that was set out on a little balcony that looked from the rear of the Turtle across the Windward Passage to where Cape Maysi loomed at the western end of Cuba like a blue cloud. His pockets were well lined with gold from a successful sea-foray, there was a laughing, black-eyed wench on his knee, a bottle of good wine on the table beside him, next to two pistols and his sword, booty from a Spanish captain who had yielded it and his life at the same time to the lanky buccaneer after a pretty scrape of steel.

He was well content and in no mood to be interrupted. Far below, his ship, the *Rover*, a brig of eighty tons and twelve guns—including the bow-chaser that was his favorite weapon and from which his nickname had been applied—lay at anchor beside its consort the *Falcon*, a lesser craft. The day was fine, the wine was good and the wench complaisant. He had earned holiday and he meant to enoy it.

He took a draft after the girl had sipped at it and stroked the excess wine from his long black mustachios, cleared his bronzed, lean throat that showed a knife-scar that had barely missed his jugular in some sharp hand-to-hand rally, and began to troll the chantey the wench had coaxed him for.

"A great ship went a-sailing,
  A galleon of Spain;
All gilded was her railing
  A flag flew at her main.

Blow, blow, let the wind blow.
  Sail she fast or sail she slow,
We'll spend the gold that weights her hold,
  Bully boys, all, yo-ho, yo-ho!
Bully boys all, yo-ho!

With wine and dice and laughter
  The dons they——"

He followed the roll of the girl's eyes and saw the potboy, cringing but openly admiring the bold sea rover, standing on the sill of the door that opened to the porch.

"Ha!" roared Davis. "Stap me, you peeper, I've a mind to shoot your eyes out!"

The boy's look of horror, the girl's start as she put out her hand to check the arm he moved toward his weapons, put Davis into good humor.

"I'll not hurt him, sweetheart, or you, as long as you stay amiable. Who sent ye, pouter?"

The lad—his breast stuck out like that of a pigeon, misshapen—stammered his message.

"There's one below. A Portygee. Calls himself da Costa."

Davis felt the girl stiffen in his arms.

"What's wrong, lass?"

"I'll—I'll not have you leave me—for any Portugee."

"I'll do as *I* please, *carita*. If it pleases you, you're lucky."

She looked at him with eyes veiled by long lashes, lighted by a woman's look, worshiping his dominance but with another emotion, as of a stronger shining through a weaker flame; still there as she subsided to his pressure. He held her as easily as a boy might hold a rabbit, petting her a little but letting her know his mastery.

"I know no da Costa," he said. "How looks he?"

"He is short and swarthy," said the lad. "Bow-legged enow and with the end of his nose missing. Belike was slashed?"

"Belike 'twas bit! I know him not."

"He said 'twas important, that he had come a long way to bring th' word."

"He *said*—! How much did he grease your palm with to come up?"

"Not a real. I swear it."

"Tush, you're too young to swear. Here's a piece-of-eight for ye. I'll see him inside the room. Let down the awning. *Carita*, you'll wait me outside. Don't spoil your mouth by pouting."

She showed him her white even teeth before she pursed her lips for a kiss.

"Why, there's a willing bird. You learn well. Now, boy, bring up this Portygee. Take in the wine. Bring another goblet. So."

He closed the door to the balcony. There were two windows; but their panes were of bull's-eye glass, more translucent than transparent. He chuckled at the thought of the girl balked in an endeavor to learn what went on in the room. That would not be altogether from feminine curiosity, he fancied. He knew women well enough; and he felt sure that the wench's movement at the mention of the Portuguese had been more at the sound of his name than jealousy at interference to their dalliance.

He sat with his back to the panes, the second chair placed across him at the table. He had left his sword outside but brought his pistols with him. They were tucked between broad leather belt and his sash of heavy crimson silk brocade. He was a bit of a dandy at heart, Long Tom Davis—though, to do him justice, his somewhat elaborate costumes were planned more to command respect and emphasize his rank than for reasons of conceit—albeit he was not lacking in appreciation of their effect upon the women whom he played with when ashore.

His black hair was inclined to wave and reached, glossy and well kept, to the deep collar of his laced coat of dark maroon worn above a yellow brocaded vest and ruffles in which a jeweled brooch sparkled. His face, save for the long mustachios, was scrupulously clean-shaven, though the razor could not prevent the showing of the beard, blue on the dark bronze of his skin. So heavily had sun and wind tanned him and salt water glazed the tan that, but for his gray-green eyes, he might almost have passed for an Indian with his high-bridged nose and showy cheekbones. When he smiled, his teeth, good as those of the girl, Josefa, flashed in their dark setting like the foam-plume on a deepsea wave.

A brave figure with his laced coat, his velvet breeches tucked into high boots, rings of loot on his long, strong fingers where the hair grew down to the last joints. A rover born, who preferred piracy to planting under the numerous editions of Lord Ashley's Fundamental Constitution that sought, in the opinion of Davis and many others, to make a serf out of a freeman.

Davis could sing upon occasion, or keep silent. He could lead a boarding party with a rollicking laugh or he could fight against heavy odds with his face as bleak as the back of a blizzard and eyes like cloudy emeralds, hard and piercing. It was said that he feared neither God nor devil, man nor woman, any more than he loved them. It was doubtful if he was loved; it was certain that he was feared.

Only one man had stood up to him and faced him with charges of chicanery and he had set him—though he was chosen captain of the *Falcon*, consort of Davis' own *Rover*—in an open boat with a small keg of salted beef and a bottle of brandy, adrift a hundred miles to the eastward of the Little Bahama Bank. This in the face of open mutiny that he had subdued without the flash of pistol or scrape of blade.

He wondered a little what had happened to Rogers as he waited for da Costa to come to him. He had done what he had in self defense, from purely selfish reasons. He lived only for the preferment of Davis, the indulgence of Davis' appetites. He would do it again without compunction, even as Rogers would have done it to him if he had been quicker-witted to follow up his charges.

IT WAS a dead calm off the Little Bahama Bank. Rogers and his men had rowed over from the *Falcon*, leaving only four men aboard, to be present at the loot division held on the deck of the *Rover*. Booty from a treasure galleon, enough to make them all rich—as average riches went—but "light got, light wot," destined to be flung away in folly. A tenth of all to each skipper, a twentieth to each mate, each supercargo, acting as representative for the men; the rest split up among the crew with first choice to the carpenters and master gunners.

The loot lay on the deck, roughly appraised by Davis as worth one or so many shares; the coins counted scrupulously and divided first. It made a brave array under the sun; the buccaneers, half naked, all their bodies bronzed save what was breeched, squatted about in a ring with greedy eyes as they watched the division. There were silks and weapons, jewelry and clothing, laced coats and plumed hats, boots and buckles, lustrous and glittering as the brig rolled slowly from side to side. Dice clicking on the deck to determine the order of selection, bottles of Spanish wine with broken necks, staining the deck with their slops; coarse jests, quick jealousies but withal good humor. Quarrels that drew blades were swiftly checked for settling ashore. No pirate ship came in to Tortuga that did not have half a dozen duels to be decided.

Then Rogers' harsh challenge to Davis.

"Where's the ruby and diamond brooch you took from *el capitan?*"

So! Rogers had been spying. Before the meaning of the charge sifted into the minds of the men, dulled with wine and the hot noon, Davis assumed the attack.

"You lie, you dog! Charge me with cheating my own men, do ye? Turn on me after I give ye the *Falcon?* Why, you cur, for a dib I'd hang ye!"

He had given the nod—he chuckled at the recollection of it—to his two best worthies, and they jumped at Rogers and disarmed him even as he clutched his pistol. Some quirk, some sense of the value of equity in the long run, rather than a qualm of conscience—for he had the brooch in his own bosom at the moment—stopped him from running Rogers through.

And in that he took credit. There was a quality in him that loved to accept a risk, to see a man reach for his pistol and to beat him with a sword that slipped its sheath and, like a stroke of blue lightning, flicked up the barrel, circled in fast *riposte* and slithered through the opponent's ribs. There was a quality in him that loved the *tic-a-tac* of swift sword-play.

Rogers was better far with slash of cutlas than with sidling thrust of rapier. He had his qualities; but, to Davis, coordinant extraordinary, he was but a dub at a *duello* and Davis disdained the combat. He whipped him with words, he disarmed Rogers' own crew with his dazzling verbiage. They gaped at his quick sentences, straining to get their meaning, while he whipped them through to his own end.

He gave Rogers no time to follow up and —*presto*—there was Rogers in the jollyboat, ten feet by forty inches, a cockleshell bobbing on the blue water as the breeze sprang up and Davis drove the still half-bewildered crews to sheets and braces, making for Green Turtle Cay Anchorage. Rogers with his salt beef and his brandy—no water—bobbing, bobbing until he and the boat were merged in a tiny speck. Rogers, shaking both impotent fists and cursing, swearing to get even.

Ten to one—twenty to one—that the sharks had Rogers before this. A good man in a rough-and-tumble fight, Bill Rogers, but slow of wit and a poor hand with a sword.

Funny he should have thought of him.

He had proven himself the better bullyman of the two.

"Come in, da Costa."

A SHORT man, stocky, swarthy, with the end of his nose stumped off so that the nostrils showed like those of an ape. Eyes that could never remain fixed, with the irised pupils trembling on the whites like a floating compass card. A hairy chest showing where a red-striped shirt of dirty silk was open. Long arms thrusting out of a short jacket of green. Big hands curving about an imaginary rope. Wide breeches cut off at the knees. Bucket boots turned over, showing swelling, hairy calves.

A twisted grin revealing broken, yellow teeth. An air of swagger that gradually vanished before the steady gaze of Long Tom Davis, gazing at him, chin in hand. Such was da Costa.

"Who sent you?"

The abrupt challenge placed da Costa as messenger, not principal. It galled him a little, brought back some of the blustering mien.

"I'm supercargo aboard the *Sea Horse;* Captain Halsey."

"Oh-ho!" said Davis softly. "I have

heard of him, but not of you. Still, have a glass of wine?"

While da Costa filled his measure and drank greedily, Davis gathered what he already knew of Halsey. An outlaw among outlaws. A buccaneer to whom Tortuga was proscribed because he had given up one of his fellows to a gallows at Port Royal—a gallows first and then exposure of his quartered corpse, tarred and parceled in canvas.

Thievery was one thing, treachery another. One might gull one's comrades but to betray them went beyond the code. Halsey was a boycotted buccaneer, plundering with a lone hand. A traitor to his kind. It was not even known that he held a grudge against the executed man. He had done the thing for British guineas.

"I don't think much of the master," said Davis quietly. "What is your message, my man?"

The heady wine emboldened da Costa. His dark skin flared crimson.

"I am no man of yours or any other. I bring word from a comrade of yours—so he claims. One Rogers."

Davis sat like a statue, his eyes cold, fixed on the other.

"Where is he?"

Da Costa grinned.

"Where you're not like to find him; where he'll stay, unless you send him ransom."

The mouth of Long Tom Davis grew a little grim, but there was a humorous light in his eyes. Rogers appealing to him for ransom! He must be in sorry plight. At the bitter end of his rope.

"What does Halsey ask?"

"A thousand pounds in gold—or its equal."

Davis broke into a laugh.

"I don't value *myself* that high."

Da Costa shrugged his shoulders.

"That is the price."

"Of his freedom?"

"Of his life."

Davis cogitated. Da Costa helped himself to the wine.

The appeal stirred something in Long Tom, aside from the quaint humor of the situation.

Rogers had put him in jeopardy of losing his command, if not the same fate to which he had consigned Rogers. He had turned the table on Rogers by his quick wit. And he had kept the ruby-and-diamond brooch. No one else had dared broach the matter, dared imply that Long Tom, buccaneer, was a thief. The brooch was worth easily two hundred pounds—two hundred and fifty. What with Rogers' confiscated loot going to him as sole commander, until another was chosen, under the Laws of the Brethren, he was ahead the amount of the ransom. True he had spent a good deal and contemplated spending the rest.

He had another vision of Rogers in the jolly-boat, cursing and shaking his fists, vowing to be even, praying God and the devil to give him a chance. Rogers, picked up and held on some secret cay, the rendezvous of Halsey, sending for ransom to the man he had cursed. And, even as he had done as he stood on the poop of the *Rover*, Davis began to laugh, silently at first, while da Costa watched him wonderingly. At last Long Tom's fist came down in a blow that shook the heavy table and made the casements rattle.

"Sink me, there's none but Rogers would have the nerve to send to me. Am I his first choice?"

"First and last," he said.

"How do I know you are not cozening me? Did he send no token?" Davis knew that Rogers could neither read nor write.

Da Costa repeated the twitching grimace that served him for a grin. He fumbled in his pocket and took out a little box of hardwood with a sliding lid. It seemed filled with coarse salt.

"Halsey thought of that," he said. "Maybe you recognize this?"

He slid the lid completely out of its grooves, turned the box upside down. An object fell dully to the table top, a leathery thing, brown, touched with purplish crimson. There was the glint of gold, tarnished with a filmy smear. A human ear, severed close to the head, a ring in the lobe, an old scar in the shape of a notch at the top of the helix. The right ear of Rogers!

Davis turned it over with his finger.

"It is Rogers' ear," he said. "So Halsey thought of that, eh? A shrewd touch. How's the wine?"

"Good."

"A fine flavor?" Davis poured a measure for himself. "And a rare odor. But a trifle lacking in strength?"

"Mayhap."

Da Costa was beginning to be at his ease. He had little fear that any one in Tortuga knew him. And Davis, for all his reputation of harsh temper, was acting sensibly.

"We'll have up a bottle of brandy. From France. A man's drink. I'll call the lad," and Davis shouted his order from the head of the stairs. "How is this ransom to be paid? To you?" he asked when he resumed his seat.

"You are to bring it to Skeleton Cay not later than the fifteenth. There is entrance through the reef on the southwest side at four fathoms. An old cypress stump, hollow, stands just above tidemark. Place the money in the stump. Return, in three days, and you will find Rogers on the beach. But do not come sooner, and see to it there are no topsails on the skyline in the meantime or belike you will find Rogers lacking both ears and mayhap beyond all hearing and speech."

Da Costa no longer used the accent that he had purposely emphasized in the bar below, to act as a disguise. It would not be well for any of Halsey's men to be found on Tortuga. He had taken the mission because he had never been there, hailing from the Lagoon of Tides, from the island of Carmen, in the Bay of Campeachy, the ancient buccaneer settlement.

Davis drew his fingers across his throat inquiringly. Da Costa nodded. The boy came with the brandy, and Davis passed the opened bottle to the Portuguese. He did not ask da Costa how he had come to the island, how he would leave. Da Costa was a drunkard, but he was no fool. There would be no chance to trail him. He might get some information out of him through the brandy; and, if he did not find out enough he had another card—outside on the balcony. Or so he fancied. And he was not minded to forego the frolic he had planned for himself, to lose the thousand pounds if he could avoid it.

Da Costa swigged the strong liquor, and his beady eyes shone while the stub of his nose showed raw and red.

"Where is this Skeleton Cay?" Davis asked, though he knew it well enough.

"Know you Eleutherea Island?"

Long Tom nodded.

"I have an indifferent chart of the Bahamas. It is shown thereon."

"There is Palmetto Point and then Savannah Sound. Farther to the south Jack's Bluff and so to Eleutherea Point. So to Exuma Sound. Sail nor'-nor'-west, along the land to where it ends in a hook. There are four cays off the hook. The third is Skeleton Cay. You will bring the ransom?"

"Rogers is shipmate of mine. I shall set him free."

"Good."

"You do well with Halsey? There is more of this brandy if you fancy it."

"'Tis rare liquor. With a warm bite. Do well with Halsey? His is a lucky star. Last month we took the *Reina Ysabel*. Ingots of gold and jewels. Halsey ran her *capitán* through the heart after five minutes' sword play. He has no match at that."

"So?" said Davis and set glass to lips to hide the sparkle in his eyes. "So? He is a swordsman of parts?"

"None better on the Main."

A second bottle of brandy followed, and a third. There was scant need to ply da Costa with questions. He boasted in his cups. Of booty stored and buried, of the settlement on his rendezvous, of women kept there—with and without their wills. But he never revealed the location of the place. It was a secret that might cost him life to give up; the holding of it was ingrained within his native caution. He swayed in his chair, his eyes glassy, but he never let go of that.

And at the last Davis, drinking him down until speech failed the supercargo, let him go. He had not matched the other in his quaffing; and the Portuguese, guzzling and muddled, did not notice the inequality of the bout.

Davis watched him grope for the railhead of the stairs. There was no use in having him followed. He would probably have been brought over to Hispaniola by some turtler friendly to Halsey and then come by Indian *canoa* to Tortuga. He would be careful of possible trailers. After all, it resolved itself to this: Either the ransom was to be paid or Rogers would be left on the beach of Skeleton Cay with his throat cut, to give additional color to the islet's name.

The brandy had been strong. Its fumes mingled with those of the wine; and Davis staggered a little as he opened the door and welcomed the fresh air of the balcony. He swung his arm down almost too late to stay the rush of the girl Josefa, who sought to dodge beneath and, when he caught her and held her, to seat her once more on his lap; struggled to get free.

"Know you who that was?" she cried. "You heard his name! Da Costa, who is with the villain Halsey! And you have let him go! Let me follow, I say."

She fought so furiously she almost got clear of him. She plucked a sheathed dagger from her dress, catching the scabbard between her teeth to pull the blade free, since Davis still had one hand imprisoned. The jewels in the hilt and the steel blade gleamed no more fiercely than the flash of her eyes as she struck, vicious as a viper, at the buccaneer. Long Tom, his head effectually cleared by the skirmish, struck her elbow sharply with his fist, and the dagger tinkled down to the floor of the balcony as she cried out and looked at him in half amazement at the trick that had disarmed her so swiftly and completely.

Davis set foot on the weapon, laughed at her, pulled her back on his knees, held her close and, forcing back her head, kissed her fairly on her scarlet lips, twisting in rage; kissed them until her breath was gone and she sat passive in his grip, save for her eyes; accusing him.

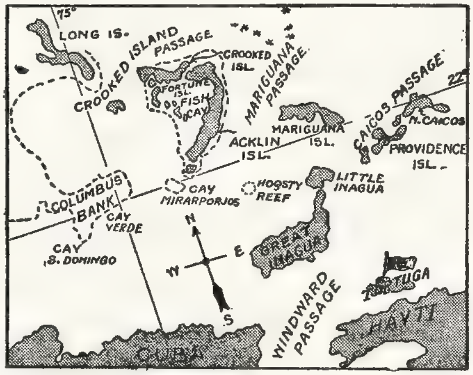
"I know who it was," he said. "What has he or Halsey to do with you, chuck? Tell me that."

"You knew him Halsey's man—and let him go," she panted. "Are you in league with Halsey? If I gave hue-and-cry after da Costa there are a hundred men on Tortuga to hold him, to force him to lead them to Halsey. Halsey's commission is void. Yet he sends a man to you—why?"

Long Tom considered Josefa for a moment. He had no scruples. The world was his garden to walk in at his will, and women were the flowers, to be plucked, worn, rifled of perfume and sweetness, cast aside. He liked one with spirit better than he did one too complaisant.

This was the first time he had seen Josefa. She had not come to him too easily. Young, vital, passionate but, if fond, not foolish. She had piqued him a little. He had been five months away from Tortuga on his profitable cruise. He found Josefa queening it over her companions, attached to no man seemingly until Long Tom Davis came. To him her eyes had given challenge that she might be won and would be worth the winning. She had lately come from Port Royal, it appeared. Young though she was, she knew how to cozen men and to cajole them.

In his rough, assured wooing of her, Davis had fancied there was beneath her carefree surface something of definite purpose. The first hint of its meaning had come with her start at the name da Costa—not an uncommon one—the next with her present mood and grievance against Halsey. Of course she had been listening at door and window and keyhole.



"*I* am asking questions between us—not you, *carita*," he said. "Answer mine. What has Halsey or da Costa to do with thee?"

There was so much of imperative challenge in his manner that she mistook it for a moment, twisting so that she could look him fairly in the eyes.

"Do you care? Art jealous?" Then she flared at the laughing mockery in the sea-green orbs, the color of ocean water before a gale. "Oh, you care for no woman. You seek to make a fool of me. I am your plaything, to be bought by your gifts and baubles——"

"You may set the price, pretty. I will tell thee this: I have no love for da Costa. As for Halsey, this stub-nosed man of his tells me he considers himself the best swordsman in the Caribbees. I have a mind to test that claim. For the rest, what passed between da Costa and me was not born of friendship. That is enough for you to know with your taunts and threats. Men run Tortuga, not wenches. You called Halsey a villain. Has he robbed you of aught?"

The girl looked steadily at him, leaning back against the balcony railing, her hands clutching the wrought iron in a grip that showed her tension.

"I came to Tortuga to find a man who

would kill Halsey," she said. "It is not for myself. What any man has done to me does not matter. There is wildness in me. What I have given, I have given. Once I was a fool. Once there was a man to whom I could refuse nothing. That has passed. Doubtless I would do it all over again. It is in my blood, as roving is in yours. You and I are Gipsies both, to one thing constant never."

"Ah!" said Davis, and hummed a song that was not yet so very old.

> Sigh no more, ladies; ladies, sigh no more.
> Men were deceivers ever.
> One foot on sea and one on shore
> To one thing constant never.

He wondered if the girl's words were mere coincidence or whether she had heard or read of Shakespeare. She was silent, apparently still weighing whether or not she should confide in him, her eyes somberly glowing.

It was plain to him in the light of circumstances that she had believed him the man who might kill Halsey for her. He wondered idly whether she had believed he would do so for her sake or if she had other inducements to offer.

Now, though the coming of da Costa had opened up the matter, it had brought her suspicions of Long Tom Davis that, for his own ends, he must dispel. Therefore he stroked his silken mustaches and returned her brooding glance with his own usual gaze of half-careless, half-reckless amusement.

"I was born at Port Royal. I left there that time I was a fool. When I came back my father cursed me—though he was a drunkard and had often beaten me. I do not think his curses have harmed me any; and they caused him to break a blood vessel so that he nearly died. He did a year later. But not before he had married again. And he left my stepmother his *cantina*. These things I did not know, being in Nassau—and elsewhere.

"I had a little sister. She was fourteen then—thirteen when I left Port Royal." Josefa broke into Spanish. "*Mi hermana niña!* My little sister!"

Davis watched her looking out to sea, her lower lip caught up in her teeth, her figure tragically stiffened, eyes hard despite the slow tears that rolled from them, fists clenched on the iron rail of the balcony; rigid save for tumultuous breast. Here was no acting. He did not care, as a rule, for the exhibition of too feminine emotion, but this served his own end.

"Halsey came to Port Royal," she continued. "They had declared him pirate at Jamaica and he came to make his peace with the governor. He did it by denouncing another man and taking blood money. That you must know.

"My stepmother had made Lola dance and sing in the *cantina* to bring trade. Halsey saw her. He was there with da Costa and his men. Some say my stepmother sold Lola to them and that they cast dice for her. That does not matter. Halsey took her.

"He had not tired of her when he left Port Royal, and she was on his ship, the *Sea Horse*. He took her to his rendezvous on the islet they call Fortune Cay. They have their settlement houses there, and their women. There is a fresh-water creek where the ships are careened. There are stores there; and there is a treasure house that is always filled with loot. The man who kills Halsey and takes the settlement will have rare pillage."

HE KNEW that she was deliberately trying to cozen him; but for the life of him he could not keep the gleam out of his eyes at the mention of the stores and the treasure. It was not greed—no man was freer from that than Long Tom—but he loved to play the game of life as he saw it; and here were the counters, the chips for the stakes. Moreover the matter of Rogers' ransom—the appeal of his late comrade—considering also the affair of the ruby-and-diamond brooch—had scored on the target of Long Tom's humor fairly in the gold. Then Halsey's brag of swordplay. It looked to Davis as if he might be able to pull off a triple coup, with a good fight thrown in.

He had knowledge enough not to interrupt the girl as some would have done. She had led a good card. He would wait until she had put down as many on the board as she held, or would uncover, before he played.

"There are channels through the reefs, some good on all tides. And these are hard to discover. I know them all. I can make a map of the isle and the cays near it. To the man who swears to me, to the man whose word I can trust that he will kill Halsey, all this loot is his reward and—if he wishes, I will be his slave. I will serve him in all things. I will be his faithful leman and his dog, to fawn upon him or to bite his foes, to watch and ward, to lick his hand until the end of my life for gratitude."

"But not for love?"

"I did not speak of love. If you jest with me——"

She leaped away from him, enraged, eyes ablaze and color high, beautiful, graceful as a jaguar.

"I did not mean to jest, Josefa. You offer much. All for the sake of Lola?"

"For the sake of my little sister. You would not understand. She was all that I am not—sweet, pure. *Sanctissima Maria!* She sang like a wild bird; she danced as leaves dance in the wind, as thistle-down floats. And he took her and thrust her in the muck of his own lust until she died from the shame of it. I saw her die—die because she did not care to live. *Suicida. Sí,* without priest or absolution. She would have none of them.

" 'I am unclean, unclean!'

"I heard her moan that day and night, awake and asleep. For he tired of her and his men tired of her; and so, since they no longer wanted her, since the older cast-off women, the Indian hags they had stolen, no longer watched her, she took a little *canoa* and stole away—my little sister.

"She told me the story of that flight, of the currents taking her and the sharks following. One seized her paddle, and the rest nosed at her *canoa* until the tide brought her to shallows they did not care to enter. The *canoa* stranded on a shoal where there were palmettos and some bushes. She wanted to get ashore because she saw *manchineel* apples growing there and she knew their juice would kill her.

"She did not have much courage. She was afraid of the sharks, she was afraid of a dagger, but she thought that to eat the fruit would be an easy way to die. All about her were the shoals, and when the tide came up she knew the sharks would come in again.

But when she tried to wade ashore the barracuda attacked her. Her legs were scarred with their bites when I saw her, weeks afterward. So she climbed back into her *canoa*, and the tide took her when it came up and carried her, helpless, without paddle, without food or drink, with the sun beating down and the sharks nosing the *canoa*, out into the main passage. How long the tides shuttled her she never knew; but an old turtler found her at last, burned black, with her tongue swollen like a mushroom and her pretty mouth one great sore.

"He was kind, that old man. He is dead now; but I saw him rewarded. I would have sold myself to a Carib for gold to give to him. After a while he brought her with a load of shell and live turtles to Nassau; and so she came back to me at last.

"That is nothing to you perhaps; but to me, to me—" she hit herself with her finger ends— "it means that I would trail on my hands and knees through —— if I thought I could find Halsey and make his torment worse. Yet I am but a woman; and I need a man. Not one who would trick me out of the position of Halsey's rendezvous and sneak in to sack it when Halsey was away, but one who would put it to the flame, make it a pyre for the beasts that make up his crew and split Halsey's black heart on the end of his sword. Had I the strength and the skill I would do it myself. I would cut it from his breast and toast it over coals for a sacrifice."

Davis watched her in the heights of her tragic rôle, seeing the naked soul of the woman, sublime in her love, in her remorse.

"I should have guarded her. Now I will avenge. And I need a man. If I try by myself I may fail; and that would be the end."

"And if one man failed, you might find another, and yet another."

"I will go along. I know the channels, and those I will keep to myself. I must see the thing done."

"And you think I am the man?"

"I have thought so. I have heard of you. I came to Tortuga to find you. I know this of you: That you have never broken your word, nor do you give it lightly. So say the men."

"I do not pass my word to women. Nor do I allow them aboard any ship of mine. It is a rule. My men abide by it. So do I."

"Rules may be broken—for reasons; and there is the loot."

"You say you can make me a map of this rendezvous," said Davis.

"Yes. I got it all from Lola many times, often in her delirium and again when sometimes she knew me. For I saw my way to her revenge."

"Then you have my word," said Davis. "As for the loot, I will take my share. And you shall choose from it what you will."

She shrank from him, her eyes incredulous.

"Think you I would touch any of it? You are indeed a man!"

"So I credit myself," said Davis composedly, untouched by her scorn. "Look you, I will tell you something that may strengthen your faith in me. This Halsey has taken one who was a comrade of mine. He holds him for ransom. And he sent me this for token of identity." He tossed upon the table the ear that he had kept. "Da Costa was the messenger. It is in my mind to release my comrade without the ransom, to make Halsey pay—after a little swordplay. I made da Costa drunk; but he would not leak what you can tell me. So you see my own affairs march with yours. If you disdain that loot I take it that you do not disdain all jewels. Take this for a token between us."

He had a whimsy to pay for her opportune news with the brooch to which Rogers owed his present plight. He fished it out and placed it in her palm with a smile; he covered with his hand, to see the woman in her respond to the glittering beauty of the jewel, flashing with thrice a rainbow's brilliance.

"Oh!" she gasped and held it in the sun, then set it on her breast with its pin through the stuff of her low-cut gown.

She dipped a finger in her wine and drew on the table top the outline of two irregular, narrow cays, separated by a narrow channel. One ran east and west, the other north and south, save for a long peninsula like a neck that ended in a mass of land strangely like the head of a dog.

They inclosed in an irregular crescent a bay within which lay a fair-sized cay and several smaller islets.

"These are the Crooked Isles," she said. "So the turtlers call them, though they do not visit them since Halsey has made them his rendezvous. Nor will they talk about them. I got the name from the man who found Lola. The channel between them is between two and three miles wide that may be waded at low water, save for one winding channel. There are shallows all about the islets with one channel to the north, another to the south. Also there are many false channels.

"This—" and she laid her finger on the cay in the bay— "is Fortune Island; Halsey's own name. Nine miles long it is and in some places more than a mile wide, in others less than a quarter of a mile. There is a salt pond in the center, and there are many caves."

"A rare hideout," said Davis appreciatively, studying the drying chart. "Three ways to come in or go out. A rare rendezvous. With a creek, say you?"

She was quick to catch his thought.

"It would serve you well after you have driven Halsey out," she said.

"And shipped the women," added Davis.

She gave him a swift, curious look.

THE *Rover* lay on an almost breathless sea, due north of Cuba, to the eastward of the Columbus Bank, in deep water, a thing of splendor, clothed in white, ghastly in the light of the sinking moon, afloat on the pallid, silent breast of the water, her jib boom pointing to Polaris, barely under steerage way. It was close to two bells in the morning watch.

She lifted on the light ground swell with a rushing sound as the ivory canvas swung in and out to the pulsing of the failing wind. There were no bells struck. Sound carried far. The deck watch sprawled about in the shadow, seeking cat naps.

Davis stood forward by a man who heaved a lead. He was seeking a fair anchorage in the roadstead, meaning to take to the boats as soon as he found it. The low lands of the Crooked Isles lay to starboard with the opening of the bay in which Fortune Island lay. There was no sign of landfall—the cays lay too low; but he was sure of his position, working in while the breeze lasted, feeling his way, trying to save his men the fatigue of too long a pull before they attacked at dawn. The value of surprize he counted on, but he was not seeking a massacre. He had left his consort behind; but below decks he was crowded with both crews, knowing his complement barely equal to Halsey's outfit, who would fight like cornered rats with skill and desperate valor hardly to be matched.

Blades had been sharpened, pistols primed, grenades made ready for hand-flinging. His men had turned in well trigged with liquor to help them to sleep.

For himself he needed none; his blood was tingling with prospect of the fight, the grate of steel on steel, the shouts and gasps of foes in hard encounter. That was wine to him, that and the hope of evening scores, the meeting with Halsey.

The girl was below, by his orders. She had not appeared on deck. Davis had placed her in his own cabin, bunking with his mate. Her presence on board had been talked over and accepted as an exception to a rigid rule. Davis ruled his men with an iron hand, and he had given vigorous order against any assaults of the women on the island. Death was the penalty set for infraction, and they knew that it would be carried out. There was loot for them all, loot and the chance to wipe from the seas a nest of traitors.

He went aft to the helmsman, spoke to his mate, standing by the taffrail, and gave a low order. The watch was roused, and the oars creaked as the brig tacked eastward with the last of the wind, coming in flaws, astern. Slowly the *Rover* forged ahead with hardly a ripple at her bows, streaks of sea-phosphor limning her progress.

An hour later the cable rattled out to holding, the sails shrinking like magic as all hands, barefooted, clambering like apes, furled and brailed. The reluctant ship-keepers, ancients of the crew, watched their fellows swarm into the boats and pull off with greased oars and rowlocks under the stars; blots, trailing liquid fire, here and there a quick twinkle of light from steel, until they merged with the dusk, pulling silently, strongly toward where the sun would presently rise. The girl was in the stern sheets of the leading boat beside Davis.

His rapier, that he could bow till point struck hilt, was sharp as a razor on both edges, with a point like a needle. He held it between his knees, hands on the crusted grip, keen to feel it play against the blade of Halsey. The girl's small, oval face showed pale beside him. She was wrapped in a boat cloak that hid the lad's clothes she wore on her slender body. In her belt was a pistol, in her breast the jeweled dagger.

There were four pistols in Davis' belt, between it and the sash. Two more in loops on a wide baldric that supported his sword when he stood.

He alone wore boots. His men were scantily clad in short, wide drawers and shirts with the sleeves cut off above the elbows, showing the knotted, brawny arms, open at the hairy chests that rose and fell to the rhythm of the oars. Their eyes glistened in the starlight with suppressed ferocity; they were like fierce hounds on the leash. As they rowed, the pungent smell of their sweat came to Davis, and his nostrils dilated.

The game was started; the stakes on the board.

Halsey, calculating chances, had given Davis twelve days in which to reach Skeleton Cay with the ransom. He had used but three of these. Rogers should still be on Fortune Island. There was the chance that Halsey would be away, but Davis dismissed that. He was as sure of finding them as he was of the beating of his own heart, steady and strong. The game was on.

The soft swash of surf came to them across the silent water. Davis, with eyes like a cat's in the dark, saw the faint glow of it, softly gray and luminous, guarding the bay. Beyond, the loom of palmettoes, mangroves, scrub, marking the islets, the farther cays.

The girl stirred beside him, laid hand on his arm.

"Row slowly along the outer reef to the south," she said. "As close as you dare take the boats."

Davis swung his helm. The following boats swung serpentine, straightened out, paddling with stealthy vigor along the murmuring barrier.

The settlement faced seaward. The creek emptied close beside it. It was Davis' plan to row up the stream, masked by the mangroves, and to make landing in two places. Then to storm front and rear at the signal of two shots.

The east was graying. Slowly objects seemed to come into focus. It had been a long pull, and now dawn was imminent. There was a strange stirring on the water. A fish leaped. The phosphor disappeared. The islets beyond the reef took form.

"Here!"

The girl's eager whisper broke the morning hush. There was a gap in the low breakers, and the boat entered it as light filtered through the dusk. The features of the rowers revealed themselves, scarred, twisted, noses broken here and there, wolf eyes; mouths open as they pulled to beat the sunrise, the tips of their tongues showing between teeth stained with the quids they chewed in silence. A hardbitten set of rogues, thought Davis, captain and whipper-in of the pack. Surly dogs, rough in their humor, rough in their fighting; proven all. Good Brethren of the Coast.

Josefa had found then the entrance of the channel, a performance almost miraculous in itself, considering that her information was second-hand, if not more remote. It was doubtful whether her younger sister had herself marked the entrances. She was more likely to have heard of them from the casual talk of the settlement. But here they were, with the tide flooding, bubbling in; and so far luck was with them. But there were many chances against them yet.

They were racing the sun. The crepuscular atmosphere was swiftly dissolving, the stars balancing overhead; already there seemed to Davis' anxious eyes a tinge of yellow in the sky back of the Crooked Cays.

In the boats and the dusk they were too close to the water to judge the path of the channel by the changing colors of shoals and reefs. Here was a maze of waterpaths that looked equally inviting but all of which, save one, were *culs-de-sac*, traps; for they could not afford to make a mistake.

There were odds that they might not count on—the probability that Halsey's men would sleep late. There was a palisade about the settlement, a twelve-foot stockade of sharpened stakes, that Halsey relied upon chiefly to prevent against surprize. For this Davis had brought lengths of rope, the bights of which would be cast over the sharpened ends of the poles, giving his men a double length, up which they would swarm nimbly as the sea-apes they were when it came to climbing.

He had all the details of his attack planned, provided they could gain the top of the stockade unchallenged. He wanted a fight, no tame surrender; and indeed Halsey's dogs were likely to fight in any event. But Davis wanted to rouse them, to bring them out of their houses with their weapons, surprized, a bit bewildered perhaps, their numbers lessened by pistol shots and the grenades. Their own pistols would not be likely to be primed—many of them. The night air invariably damaged the powder in the pans.

But after the first upset they would all be at it, hammer and tongs, each man choosing his antagonist with hack and slash of singing steel or silent thrust of knife while they wrestled and parried and lunged. Bully work on a bully morning.

All spoiled—if they got there too late. The guns of the *Sea Rover* could blow them out of the water if they were discovered trying to make the creek. Davis wondered if there would be a log boom or a chain across the stream. Much depended upon how secure Halsey fancied himself.

Josefa had the bearings which she told Long Tom, and he followed them as best he could in the half light, using also all his skill in noting the swirls and eddies of the incoming tide that might mark the main channel. The tide helped them to speed without effort, gave them motion that left them comparatively free to fend off, to pull or back water in response to Davis' signal of command.

Two islets they passed—a third showed; Fortune Island. Now the sky back of the palmettoed ridge of Crooked Cays was unmistakably saffron. The stars were gone utterly. In a few minutes the sun would come leaping up, and it would be day. High, high overhead a little cloud that had been invisible, then gray, was now lavender. Soon it would flame rose color, a herald for the dawn.

Long Tom's face was set, frowning as he timed the stroke, bending forward from the hips. Now the channel was fair ahead, the girl whispered. A rocky point jutted out from the lining mangroves. Around it was the opening of the creek. They would probably not see the settlement for the trees; but the fresh water of the creek made a deep basin, killing the coral, and there, if Halsey was at his rendezvous, they should see his ship, the *Sea Rover*.

Davis had considered boarding this but rejected the plan. Once they were ashore, the guns from the brig could not harm foe without hurting friend. The issue would be too closely joined. If they won they would take the *Sea Rover* as prize. He had men enough for two crews, counting the usual percentage of casualties. They would run to a high score, he did not doubt. If not of killed, of men disabled.

He had warned Josefa to keep out of the offensive lest her costume might bring her into trouble.

"I can take care of myself," she flashed at him.

Now the little cloud was afire and Davis gave an order in a low voice.

"It's touch and go now, lads. Put your best into it. If they see us, they see us. We can't back out. Pull, bullies. Break your backs!"

There was color now, growing brighter, as the colors grew on a tinted lantern slide when the operator adjusts the lens. The water spurted from the oar blades in white spray as the buccaneers threw weight and strength against the fulcrum of the tide and the ashen levers bent like canes in the short, hard strokes.

Around the rocky headland. It was porous as a sponge with caves. All about fish were leaping, birds twittering and chattering. As the boat passed, a flock of flamingoes flushed, settling into flight with harsh cries.

The brig lay anchored offshore by two moorings. Her canvas was brailed, the lower courses stripped from the yards. There were evidences of overhauling going on. And there was clearly no anchor watch aboard. Halsey was here.

Then they were out of the sunshine, entering the creek.

Davis landed two boat crews on the hooping mangroove roots to make their way to the palisade on the shore side.

"Never mind the gate," he said. "Let one or two climb first and the rest follow if there is no sign of wakefulness. Look out for smoke from early fires. If you see any, wait for my shots from up river. Then to it. Don't waste your powder. Don't fling your grenades too soon. No looting till I give the word. And fire no houses. Those are orders, mind you, and, if I find a man who dodges them, I'll leave his body rotting on the sand for the land crabs."

The girl looked at him with widening eyes. Here was a new Davis. Here was Long Tom barking like his namesake. She had imagined him in action. The reality outdid her thought. Here was a fighting man incarnate, a commander whose lightest word was law.

The faces of his men were grim and hard enough, lighted with the zest of the attack, showing ferocity that was brutish; but Long Tom Davis outmatched them all in the sheerly sinister aspect of his tightened mouth, his dilating nostrils and the narrowed lids where his eyes shone bleakly through. His silken mustaches seemed to have become vibrant, to move in accord with the snarl with which he emphasized his orders and his threat. Here was stark manhood set for the kill. Wolves they were, all of them, lawless, fearless, cruel and lusting for spoil; and Davis was the fitting leader of the pack.

Up shot the wheeling, burning disk of the sun. The eastward sides of all things shone as if the light were flung on them through ruby glass. To the west long shadows stretched; the shadow of the island lay etched upon the bay like a darker stain of violet upon blue.

Only in the mangrove-shaded stretch of the river the dusk still lingered. Flocks of squawking green parrots bombed upward, screaming until it seemed as if their shrill alarum must wake the whole island. Doves shot through the twisting aisles between the trees. The grease was off the oars now, and they clacked against the thole pins.

"Row, you herring-gutted laggards," called Davis, each syllable like a lash of wire. "Row, blast your shriveled souls; row!"

The boats fairly leaped half-length from the quiet water at every stroke. The creek curved, and they ran in, shipping oars, grasping at the slimy, oyster-crusted roots to urge the craft farther, then making their way like ropewalkers, like apes-of-the-sea, carrying their weapons lest they trip them into the sucking ooze, through mangrove belt to guava scrubs—some of them snatching at the fruit, their throats parched after the long row, their teeth crunching through the crisp rinds into the pink, acid pulp while they bandied whispered jests.

Once or twice Davis had turned to help the girl with a ready hand; but ever he found her active as any of them, and more agile, swinging along, her eyes lustrous with spirit. He gave her a grim nod of approval as they reached the foot of the palisade.

"You'll pass, for a woman," he said.

She laughed back at him with a flash of teeth. Her hair was bound up in a handkerchief of bright green and yellow silk; there was an orange sash about her hips. She took out her dagger and set it in her belt, then placed it half mockingly between her teeth in imitation of some of the buccaneers, making ready to fling their ropes and climb.

Now men had borne a keg of liquor from the boat. A hatchet opened up the head and metal cups were dipped into the fiery stuff and passed about. There were forty-two with Davis, not counting the girl. Twenty-six more in the party left for the front attack. Sixty-eight in all, against a rough estimate of eighty. Pistol bullets and grenades should see the score swiftly evened, Davis fancied.

He had not bothered himself overly about Rogers. He might be confined in a hut or he might be given ordinary liberty of the settlement, pending ransom. If they guessed the nature of the attack, if Halsey foresaw that here was Davis attempting to eliminate the payment of the thousand pounds, he might give an order to pistol his captive out of hand. That was a chance Rogers must take, thought Davis. After all, his rescue was not the only object of the raid.

Thought of Rogers gave him thought of the ruby-and-diamond brooch. He saw it sparkling on the girl's tunic.

"Best tuck something over that," he said. "There's not a man inside but would slit your throat—did they think you lad or wench—at a sight of it. Now, bullies, up with you!"

The rum warm in their bellies, stirring the blood in their veins, the buccaneers deftly set loops about the stakes, put their feet to the timber and swarmed up as readily as if there had been ladders set against the palisade.

Davis set the empty keg upright and motioned to the girl to stand on it.

"The ropes 'll skin your hands," he warned her. "Quickly now."

He held up his hand and, as she stepped on the broad palm, lifted her with one even move that brought her to where two brawny rascals clutched at her and swung her up between them.

Within the palisade the ground had been largely cleared. The huts were set without regard of line, rather with a view to avoiding rocky and uneven ground. No smoke came from any roof or open fire. There was no sign of life save some doves. For a moment the girl's heart sank. After all their action of late night and early dawn it seemed incredible that this place should be so quiet with any living there. Yet there was the ship. They would not have left without the ship. Unless——

BELOW her two pistol shots cracked out. Davis leaped from the ground, his stout fingers twining about the serrated top of the palisade. In the one motion, it seemed, he was up beside her. Then they were all down, racing toward the houses, whence broke out a babble and a rabble of half-dressed men, of women hanging behind, most of the men diving back for weapons.

The buccaneers shouted a stentorian huzza to follow Davis' first shout of "From the Seas," the slogan of all who went "on the account." It echoed back from seaward, where the rest of them could be seen coming through the trees. Pistols barked; a few men fell, some on either side. Women screamed and hid, or, rushing from the houses, flocked together to one side in a grove of saplings, watching the fight with little love toward their present masters but fearful of a still harsher fate.

One woman there was who came out beside a man, carrying his belt that she helped to buckle round him, handing him a sword, standing in the open as he sprang forward, rallying his men—beyond doubt the leader, Halsey. He was in knee breeches and short hose, shirtless, low shoes on his feet that the woman had knelt to buckle. He called to her over his shoulder, and she ran to the hut, coming back to the doorway with a brace of pistols and a horn of powder from which she reprimed them, then hurried to her man, who took them and fired one of them at a buccaneer who ran in on him with a cutlas, dropping him with a bullet in his brain.

Grenades were falling, exploding, more bodies huddled here and there. Little knots of men engaged, breaking up into single combats, some driven back in desperate defense against cut and slash, others with blood streaming, valiantly standing up to it, grappling sword arms, bringing a cleverer fencer to the ground, where they rolled in red dust, striking and cursing with knife blades glinting as they rose and fell.

Halsey, gathering his men together, made first for the lesser party, hoping to overwhelm them before they could join forces with Davis. And Long Tom, cursing as others came between him and his quarry, fought his way through the battling mob. Two opposed him directly, and each he ran through the lungs before their uplifted arms could fall with their heavier weapons. The third ran, and he hamstrung him with a swift play of his wrist as the wise coward leaped rather than face sure death—only to gain it in the back between the shoulders.

Close at hand, his men were having the best of it. They were tensed with anticipation, spurred with rum, with the thought of loot; the others' blood was sluggish at first from sleep, and in those early moments they went down fast before the more wakeful eyes, the swifter arm.

Davis gathered together a few who had dispatched their men, and they hewed themselves a way through a band of desperate opponents, mowing them down, at some loss to themselves, springing on, sweating and bloodied, swinging their cutlases, led by Long Tom, whose rapier was dewed with heavy red drops to the hilt, gathering and running down the channel of the blade, dripping from the point.

He had lost sight of the girl, had forgotten her in the lust of fight; his attention was entirely absorbed in the swift, hard scrape of steel, seeing the light of hate mount and grow dim while he let out the life of the one who sought his own, through the narrow, all-sufficient gateway of the slit he deftly made in the onleaping, vigorous body that crumpled like a leaf flung in the fire as the Spanish blade bit deep into the vitals.

He saw, with swift tail glances, that his twenty-six had lost at least a fifth of their number before Halsey's desperate onset. Driven back, all fighting desperately, many of them had their backs to the palisade, striving to fend off two blades at once, unable to bring their own into offensive play. Another and another went down.

The swing and turmoil of the furious fight had scattered his own company far apart; but now, as he waved his bloody blade over his head and called to them in a voice that rang like the blare of a trumpet, they came toward him, stepping over the slain, stopped now and then by Halsey's men. Here they had all the best of it, though the air still rang with cries and yells of fury or despair, with the clash of steel and over all the clarion of Long Tom.

"To me! To me! Herd 'em, bullies! We have them now. To me!"

Herding them they were; for the defenders, hardset, were falling back to where Halsey, winning his skirmish, might rally them. The odds were fairly even in numbers now—perhaps sixty on either side still on their feet. The rest either lay prone or writhed in helpless endeavor and agony or dragged themselves apart to bind up their wounds as best they could and stop the spouting blood.

The women still kept apart in a sullen group that had ceased to scream. They made no attempt to aid or injure the wounded on either side. Only the one who had been with Halsey still hovered near him, amid the trees where, with his sword, even as Davis, he overmatched the clumsier blows of cutlas and knife.

It was all cold steel. There was no chance to reload pistols, once discharged in the fast rush and swirl of the attack.

The bright sun, mounting, threw the shadows of the combatants in grotesque mockery upon the ground, clotted the spilled blood, while the parrots screamed above the mangrove tops and the swift minutes passed, each laden with a soul unshriven, sped by foul oaths and curses on the lips that grew pallid with the parting.

Davis and his gathered score hurled themselves to the rescue of their hardset comrades. More would follow them as they bested their men.

But Long Tom was growing restless at so much slaughter. Here was dog killing dog. Halsey was a traitor to the Brethren; but it did not follow that his men would not make an excellent crew under another leader if he was capable of whipping them into line, as Davis could.

He had both whetted his sword and wetted it. It remained for him to cross it with Halsey. With Halsey out of the way the fight should be won, he would be in possession of the island, the settlement, the stores, the brig and all the loot, together with such of the men as he could persuade to join him. There would not be many holding back when offered choice of shares under an able captain or marooning on some desolate, waterless cay.

His brain worked while he fought, while he surveyed the fortunes of the field and coolly, dispassionately despatched those who opposed him. His blade glanced and flickered in the checkered shadows of the little wood, set aside the rude thrusts and warded off the bludgeon blows of Halsey's hairy, tarry seaman.

There came a lunge, swift as a flung javelin; and an attacker coughed and went down with red bubbles oozing up from where the Spanish sword had opened a road to and through his lungs. One he pierced through the armpit while the cutlas was at the end of its curve, stepped aside from the falling weapon and left the brawny ruffian clasping his great fingers about his shoulder, astounded.

"Lost motion, fool!" said Davis. "Up you swing and down you swing while I go straight to the marrow o't."

And he nodded to the other as he leaned against a tree with the bright blood spurting out of him. A knife came whistling, thrown by a man who did not care to risk closer encounter. With a flick Davis deflected it, bounding on to where Halsey turned to meet the charge.

"Ha, Halsey! Show your skill, man. Have at you!"

Halsey, his naked torso smeared with blood, which seemingly was none of his own, glared at the buccaneer who had dared to attack him in his own stronghold. Da Costa had not yet returned, and Halsey believed him traitor. How else had Davis discovered him? Furious at the trick turned to rescue Rogers and cheat him of an easy ransom, he roared out an oath.

"I'll spit you, trickster; blast your cheating soul!"

His hair was red, recently stubbled on his scalp for coolness, though his spade beard hung to where it touched the rufous shag on his broad chest. He leaped, crouched, lunged at full length and as his blade grated against that of Davis, angled to divert the thrust, made parry against the short, smart stroke of Long Tom's riposte, given without moving from his stance. The two hilts met, rang like a bell as both recovered and engaged.

There was a fair space amid the trees. The light was bad, slanting down in checkery of shade through the leafy boughs; but it was equal, save as one might work the other into a dazzling ray against the sun.

The use of the long rapier called for much muscular effort when equals were opposed, and in this both seemed fairly matched; but their methods of fence varied. Halsey fought with fierce, sudden, audacious strokes that spent themselves in long *passados*, lunges and far-reaching *caricados*, while Davis contented himself for the while with his swift *ripostes*, one of which ripped Halsey's forearm slightly and brought an attack so violent that Long Tom was forced to give ground, to lose position and find himself opposite the sun for one tense moment until he disengaged and sprang apart to a new stand.

Halsey's boast was well founded. The man had been taught; but his extended attack was beginning to tell. His chest heaved, and the sweat glistened on his belly and on his brows. Both had wrists of steel wires, and the hiss and scrape of the blades attested it as they twined about each other in ceaseless effort to glide past the guard.

There was a ring about them now. Friend and foe stood eager with weapons lowered, watching the duel, sensing that on it rested the decision of the day. A red spot showed on Davis' shoulder, but he only laughed. It did not touch the bone, and it was not his sword arm.

He too had his tricks of fence, learned in Carolina from a man who had taught him the secret "foyne" of Caizo. The chance for it had not yet come, and would not while Halsey forced the fight with his long lunges. Davis' had to wear him down to shorter thrusts, to tease him into *imbrocata* strokes delivered, with nails down, at the lower part of the trunk, or to take advantage of some fortunate opening as the other tired. Meantime his *ripostes* threatened Halsey's brows; once a swift reverse of the point came close to Halsey's eyes and made him wince and give ground for a moment. Here were no rules of fence, no punctilios; one stroke was as fair as another as long as it scored.

Both fought in silence, saving their breath for their work. The lookers-on were not so silent, craning forward with gasps and grunts as some stroke seemed sure to go home and went grating along the opposing sword, to miss by a finger's breadth.

Halsey parried a thrust in *quarto*, diverting it within an inch of his breast in a sweeping parry. His men thought him wounded, for Davis' point was lost in the tangle of beard and chest hair. A shout went up as he fell on his left knee and from that unexpected angle sent his blade stroking up and out at Long Tom's neck, shaking for the jugular.

A shout and for a tense pulse beat silence as Davis, still set in his thrust, jerked back and brought his rapier down and out in a half circle with all the strength he could put into such an awkward counter. The blade made dazzling play in the sun before it jarred against Halsey's, whose thrust had seemed like a streak of white flame. With it he flung his right leg back, turning his body sidewise so that Halsey's blade flashed past, ripping his sash, slicing through the leather of his belt, which fell divided, its duty done. But for it Long Tom's belly must have been ripped open in that slanting upthrust.

But his blade was inside and his chance for his *coup* had come—a drawing stroke at the inside of the right knee, severing the tendons; then as Halsey toppled sidewise, Long Tom's rapier leaped again, home through the ribs, splitting the heart, making a deep, wide gash as Halsey's falling body ripped the sharp edge through his flesh by its own weight before Davis could clear his sword.

He stepped back breathing deeply, his point lowered, gazing at Halsey, gasping his last. The sudden, dramatic ending had caught the crowd. It was the moment for him to knit them together, the moment he had played for.

THERE was a quick rush behind him, a scream, a scuffle.

The woman who had primed Halsey's pistols and who had followed him and stayed among the trees, watching the fight, rushed from behind a trunk as Halsey fell, a knife in her hand, springing to plunge it into Long Tom's back as he stood with bowed head, catching his wind. So sudden, so unexpected was her attack that there were none near enough to interfere, while many did not guess her deadly purpose, thinking she meant only to do what she might for the stricken man.

A lad leaped out, fairly between her and Davis and while the onlookers gaped shrilled the warning that brought Davis about to find the pair too close for him to bring his sword into play. There was dagger stroke against knife thrust and the two fell together, the lad's headwrapping loosened, the streaming raven tresses proclaiming sex.

Halsey's woman, in a wild fury, twining fingers in Josefa's hair, struck again and again while she raved and cursed at Davis, who sent his sword slithering in between her ribs at last in a white blaze of wrath, hauling her body off, with the dagger of Josefa buried to the hilt in her side. Either wound would have killed, but both had come too late.

Josefa lay with blood welling up between her breasts as Davis knelt, unpinned the ruby-and-diamond brooch and sought for her hurt, instantly knowing it fatal. The stroke that would have sent him to join Halsey had found sheath in the girl's bosom.

She read the truth in his eyes, and her own implored him to stoop and listen.

"I have given—you—all—I could," she said faintly. "More—than you—would have asked."

There was a flutter of her eyelids, a little movement of the lips as if they would have added something—and then the slender form shuddered and lay very still. Davis got to his feet again, stern and set of face.

"Lads," he said, "methinks there has been enough blood spilled. There is too good picking on the seas for us to quarrel. Halsey was traitor to his own. Deny it not. While you served with him the taint was on you. Join me and I will see your shares of the loot you held preserved for you. I take Halsey's and give it to my own bullies. The women shall be sent for presently. There are none allowed under Long Tom's command. I will have them set ashore at Port Royal or Nassau, as they wish, with a coin or so to see them through .

"Come, I offer you fair terms. Do you accept them, or shall I give you an alternative? You will be under my protection. I will guarantee you immunity at Tortuga. Halsey was the head of your offending, and his own head goes back with me to show the governor that the Brethren of the Coast tolerate not treachery."

Halsey's men looked at one another with some mutterings among themselves. Without their leader they were conscious of a fatal lack of unity, of weakness. The prowess of Long Tom Davis, known to all of them already, was enhanced by his defeat of the man who had often bullied them to the point of mutiny.

And they were tired of their own company. The thought of the taverns of Tortuga, the friendship of their fellows, new faces, new yarns, new songs, appealed to them. Masterless men, what use to fight for a cause that was already lost? There was not a navigator amongst them. If they won—and the cynical look of Davis as he stood with the point of his bloody blade set in the dirt, broke that feeble hope—they would still be proscribed men.

They were sick of Fortune Island—and the terms were generous. One of them stepped out and looked at the rest for confirmation.

"There be scant use in fighting about nothing," he said. "Count us your men."

"Bury your dead," said Davis crisply. "This also," and he spurned the body of the woman. "You may put the two of them in one grave, and you will. I'll take care of my men.

"Wait. 'Shrew me, I had nigh forgot. Where is Dick Rogers?"

The man who had acted as spokesman offered to show where their captive, held for ransom, was calaboosed in a hut of coral slabs. Davis looked that way and could just discern a crimson, choleric face showing through close-set bars at a little window. He sent two of his men to fetch him.

As he stood waiting he looked at the brooch he still held in his hand. The gems were filmed with blood, but they sparkled through the smearing. He gazed at the glittering thing, closed his fingers upon it, then, frowning, stooped and refastened it at the dead girl's throat.

Rogers came up, swaggering and cursing, his clothes ragged, his stiff beard bristling in his unshaven jowls, a filthy, bloody rag bound about his head.

"Now this is shrewd of you, Davis," he said. "That rogue would never have set me free after he had fingered the ransom. A rare stroke, to take him by surprize, though sink me if I know how you discovered him!"

"You owe it to her, Dick," said Davis. "We'll take her with us, lads. She shall have Christian burial, with masses for her sister, since it would please her."

Rogers gaped, uncomprehending.

"For the love of Neptune, some one get me a stoup of wine," he said. "The villains fed me on sour beans and stale water because I would not clown for them.

"Find wine and broach a keg or two," ordered Davis. "My own throat is dry as an ashpit. We'll tend the wounded and put away the dead, and then we'll look at the loot. See that those women are quieted. Tell 'em there's naught to squeal about. Rogers, you have choice of your old ship or of the *Sea Horse*. The *Rover* is outside."

"Give me wine," growled Rogers. "There are cattle here. Let's barbecue a beef. Stap me, I've lost two stone in that pen! Then talk of commands. Man, I'm like a dried stockfish!"

Men came hurrying, rolling up two casks, staving in the heads, the wine splashing out as they dipped eagerly into it. Rogers gulped at it greedily.

"Our score is even now," he said to Davis. "You set me adrift, and now you make me a free man again."

"There was the matter of the brooch," said Davis. "I think the last I heard of you was an oath to settle that with steel once you got the chance. I am rested. This scratch is nothing. There is Halsey's rapier."

"Neptune forbid," said Rogers. "I am weak as a sick kitten for lack of food. And you will have the truth, your swordplay is too shrewd for me. Man, you have just rescued me. Would you now run me through the ribs? As for the brooch——

He began to laugh.

"I have it no longer," said Davis. "I made a gift of it that I do not care to reclaim."

"A murrain on the brooch!" spluttered Rogers. "Why then, the score is even there also. There was an emerald that winked at me, even as the gems in the brooch did at you. It was a rare gem. I had it with me in the boat. You forgot to search me when you set me adrift, except for weapons. 'Twas in my shoe. Halsey found it, curse him. I'll warrant he kept it quiet. It is too fine a stone to share."

"Him!"

Davis turned and regarded the body of Halsey, a ghastly sight in a puddle of his own gore, his jaw dropped, his eyes staring. Davis bent and removed the belt that the woman had put about him.

"I need this," he said. "Ah! Here we have it."

Next to his body Halsey had worn a cincture of canvas, tabbed with pockets. It hung heavily in Davis' hands and chinked as he inspected it. There were guineas and gold pieces of Spain and France and, in a narrow piping, loose gems. Rogers regarded them greedily.

"This is private store," said Long Tom. "I promised our bullies my share of the general loot. It will be ample for them. I count these my own spoils, since I fought for them. Is this your emerald?"

He held up the stone between thumb and

finger in a slant of sun, and it shot out rays of vivid green.

"Aye, that is it. Without a flaw."

"Too good to be shared, I think you said. I agree with you. Yet I would not cheat you."

The grimness of his face relaxed, and the gleam of humor came back into his eyes as he fumbled in his breeches pocket.

"I'll trade you this and call it even," he said.

Rogers slowly put out his open hand and stared dumbly at the object Long Tom laid within the grimy palm.

It was a leathery thing, stained with purple trickles. Something glittered dully—the gold circlet in the lobe of Roger's severed, salted ear.

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Sunset Reflections

I FEEL like writing a letter to you—to you as to one who stands in the place of all the human brotherhood—to my brother and my friend. Would to God that all men were so, and that all of us were able freely to talk the one to the other at the time of sunrise and at sunset time, as at all times of the day. The world is so full of beauty that it seems at times to me that there can be no other thing. Sitting with the gold light filtering through the trees that I have grown and planted, with the song-birds twittering and singing in my mulberry tree, with the air soft and warm and a breeze that lifts the branches gently against my low roof, it does not seem that there can be anything other than a great friendliness in this bright world.

I would that it were so. As the sun sets I will forget the evil, and the sorrow of all that is a pain, and try to see naught but the glory lights.

There is such a deep longing in my heart, for something which I can not put into words; for a something that seems to be to some degree expressed in the bird song, in the breeze, and the green trees swaying, as in the yellow light along the evening sky. It is as though one could just now and again catch those strains of a music other than earth's music and yet not quite hear those strains. There is always the question—

"What is it? What is it? Why do I long so, and for what?"

Surely there can not be a question that is unanswerable? Surely the mind of man may rise to reply to the questions of his own heart? It must be so.

There is no question for which no answer is.

One strives and strives, on, and ever onward, seeking the light. Where will the last bright lightness be? Where will the sunset ray strike at last upon the little gold key that shall unlock the door to all questionings?

I believe that the best of all things we have is just but friendship.

I believe that friendship will unlock the door at the end of our lane.

Could we but be brothers I think we need not to trouble or worry about any God. I believe—no, I know, that God would be found.

All mankind is forever eternally arguing; each man crying of his own imaginings; each trying in blindness to lead his brother toward the light—all too often endeavoring to drive him thither.

There are the hundreds of sects, the many religions, the row on row of man-made fetish gods—gods of wrath, and of anger, of jealousy and punishment. I think that there is but one God. I think that if a day might come when you and I and the rest of us would but forget ourselves, remembering rather more our brothers, God would perhaps lie backward in his chair, closing his eyes to rest and murmur—

"Foolish children to have been so long in finding me."

What need have we for war? Why must we be for all time ruled by greed and ignorance? It is so stupid—so criminally, so childishly, so babyishly stupid to quarrel; as though a boundary can make men foemen! Boundaries do. We have made them in the years gone by.

Across the road from me dwells a Scandinavian and at his side a German. Nigh to me is an Italian—there are all the nations of the earth together, neighbors and harmonious. The sun is setting upon us.

I wish that we could forget all boundaries.

I am so sick of sorrow that is needless. I talk in a way that would place me among the heretics in the viewpoint of many of the godly ones of earth. I own no creed whatever, and bow to no dogma and to no doctrine, saying simply—

"Brother, let's take a stroll in the sunset."

I will walk and talk with any one; listening eagerly to what he says, and to the thing hidden behind his speech. We are all at heart, I think, the same. It is in ignorance that we crucify, in blind stupidity that we, blind ourselves, seek to correct one another. Gentleness is great wisdom. Humility is better than many many diamonds. Friendship must be founded upon both. Prelates prate of sin, knowing themselves nothing of what sin is. Teachers teach wisdom—devoid themselves of all understanding, unable in their blindness to read the hunger in a brother's eyes.

The children are wise; meeting freely with other children whom they have never till today seen; sharing with them their playthings; singing with them their songs.

They are innocent of guile—knowing not the weed of distrust, and asking a love they freely give.

The children are running, shouting in the sunset, the light in their eyes and on their hair. Who would forbid them to run and to shout? Happiness is theirs today, for hypocrisy has not been taught to them. They recognize beauty, reveling in its ray. The laughter of peace is in their hearts and faces. They are a friendly little folk with a smile for each passer-by who will stay to speak a word with them.

I wish that I were a child with the graces of childhood, failing to understand the guile of grown humanity even when it lay before my eyes, unconscious in its presence.

There seems so little of friendliness in the world, so much of distrust.

The breeze sings of some other thing; the bird whistles of beauty; the tree echoes little songs of peace in all its swaying branches. I would like to run in the sunset, a little brother to all my other brothers, in a fair world, forgetful of all save the light upon the key at the end of the lane.

My words and my thoughts are simple and poorly expressed. Love will open the door when I come to it, though my fingers fumble and my speech is broken. Will it not?

I know that it will. There is much I do not understand. There is much that confuses me. I will forget the seeming barrenness of the summer-dried field, remembering that it will be a burst of blossom when spring comes back.

Spring may not be forever—fruit and flower come and go, to come again. The only spring that does not perish lies within me. Harvest time will come when the door swings wide at the end of the lane. Childhood, loving the best of every season, forgets the drought of summer as the cold of winter. I will be a child, remembering tonight but the light in the sky and the beauty all about me, trusting and hoping, loving a lot, seeking for another's love that my own may come to fruiting. I will ask the world for friendship—being more willing to give than to receive.

Birds have grown silent. Branches are stilled, and the sun is gone below the rim of the world.

AH POON pays his DEBTS

by E. O. Foster

Author of "Old Spuds' Last Fight," "Paddy Miles, Fighting Man," etc.

MAITLAND raised his head as the door creaked noisily open to admit Ah Poon. For a moment he thought it was the sergeant of the military police patrolling Manila who had traced him to the old godown on the banks of the Pasig. He attempted to rise and slumped back into the rickety chair. He was too drunk to escape, and the thought of a comfortable cot in the guardhouse at regimental headquarters in the Ermita district was rather comforting. Then he heard Ah Poon's squeaky voice and saw the old Chinaman limping in the shadows that flickered against the rear wall of the loft, and knew that for the moment he was safe.

The danger of arrest past, Maitland sat with bloodshot eyes staring vacantly past the tiny light that sputtered from the pith wick floating on the coconut oil in the cracked tumbler on the table before him. A vagrant puff of wind carried the sickening scent of the hot oil to his nostrils. His gorge rose, and it was with an effort that he retained his balance.

He shifted his position suddenly, sending a little house lizard scurrying up one of the heavy beams that held the center truss of the massive, tile-covered roof. He marked its flight and shuddered as it loomed bigger and bigger through the alcoholic fog that bedimmed his senses. Was he to be visited again by that fantasmagoric menagerie presided over by J. Barleycorn? He grinned soddenly and began picking with unsteady fingers at the ravelings on the sleeve of his dark blue shirt. They marked the place where his sergeant's chevrons once had rested. Now they were gone and he was plain Private Maitland, A. W. O. L., with a court martial staring him in the face, his head as hot as a company coffee boiler and his throat as raw as a pounded steak.

The grumbling of wicker cots along the walls told of the uneasy slumbers of the Chinese runners who reported each night to Ah Poon, starting out at daybreak the next morning with his orders to the boss coolies of the different labor detachments attached to the American regiments on duty in the Philippines. The place was noisome with the reek of opium.

Maitland shuddered in disgust. How he longed for the clean smell of men in barracks! He dropped his head on his arms. He was tired. Sick. Too sick to listen to the lecture Ah Poon was sure to begin the minute he finished with his runners.

"Melican soja have —— of a fight Pasig, mebbeso lose city," was Ah Poon's greeting as he limped to the chair across the table from Maitland.

"The —— you say!" Maitland attempted to rise. "And me laid up here with the D. T. staring me in the face."

He slumped again, a huddled mass, his head bumping the table, setting the tumbler a-jiggle and sending fantastic shadows scurrying across the cobwebby rafters.

With a dexterous twist Ah Poon hitched

his baggy cotton trousers around, thrust a dirty hand into his one voluminous pocket, drew forth a pigmy pipe and deposited a pinch of tobacco in its silver bowl. He had a busy day behind him and a busier night ahead; he needed a moment's solace. His pipe filled and packed, he picked a paper spill from the dozen or more standing upright in the sand box on the table, held it over the flickering flame a moment, cupped it in a lean, yellow hand and took three slow puffs, a smile of content twitching the deep wrinkles that spread like a net across his aged features.

"Can catchee plentchee money, go lite 'way."

Ah Poon stuffed the silver bowl again, blowing at the spill until it broke into flame.

"My savee plentchee money hid ol' Pliest Joss House Pasig side. Can do, Maitlan'?" Three more long puffs and then, "My no foolee you, plentchee money can do."

"Nobody needs money—" Maitland's head was slowly rising—"more than—I—Poon. I would if I could. Can do—but *no* can do; too —— drunk."

"Whassamallayou, Maitlan'? Allee timee dlunk. Allee timee makee fuss like ol' woman. Whassamala you?" Ah Poon repeated, a cunning leer creeping into the corners of his eyes. "You belong topside soja s'pose you no dlinkee like calaboo. Whatfo' you stay plison half timee? No usee blains."

The leer changed to a smile as he gazed down affectionately at the bowed head. Then with all the venom that an Oriental can throw with an adept tongue he concluded—

"You allee samee big bum."

He ducked just in time to escape the bottle that Maitland flung at him, slipping back into his seat as if nothing had happened when the missile crashed harmlessly against the rear wall of the room.

"Ol' Flozen Facee—" again Ah Poon flicked Maitland on the raw, for "Old Frozen Face" was the nickname borne by the soldier's regimental commander.

"Old Frozen Face, ——! Keep your dirty Chinese tongue off the old man. Just because Colonel Woodley jerked my chevrons is no reason for you to take up my quarrel. I'll kill my own lice, thank you."

With an effort that brought beads of sweat to his brow Maitland stood erect as he added:

"I wish I was with the regiment. I owe it a debt that I might get a chance to pay."

The note of sorrow in his voice clutched at Ah Poon's old heart.

"S'pose Ah Poon catchee some debt too. You helpee me, I helpee you. Bymby allee lite. Long time 'fo' Melican soja come Manila side Ah Poon have big godown Pasig. Havee big coolie gang workee for Spanish gen'l. Filipino Gen'l Hila' chasee Spanish soja outside. Ah Poon stay. Gen'l savvy my have plentchee money, tly makee my tellee where hidee. My say, 'No savvy, no savvy, no savvy!' "

Ah Poon's voice switched from high falsetto to a mourning cadence as he added:

"Gen'l payee my too much bobbery. Bleakee my leg, makee lame. He no catchee money."

His voice sank to a whisper at the end. He remembered; but with the reticence of the Orient he hid from Maitland the crowning indignity of Hilar's devilish persecution, an act that branded Ah Poon as a criminal in Oriental eyes and made it impossible for him to take his seat among his older brethren when they gathered to worship their ancestors in far-off China, nor why it was that by night or day he was never without the little black cap perched perkily on the back of his head. He smiled as he thought of the thousands of *onzas* still hidden in the old monastery upriver. He hesitated a moment while he sought the advice of his pipe.

"Bymby Melican soja come Manila," continued Ah Poon. "My lun away. Go back now, mebbeso can payee allee debtee one time."

He studied Maitland intently as he added—

"Payee you too, Maitlan'."

"You don't owe me anything, Poon, so that score is clean."

Maitland staggered to the window and pushed back the bamboo shutters with a sweep that ripped his army shirt from elbow to cuff.

"How fashion no owee?"

The old Chinaman limped slowly to Maitland and traced with a caressing finger the red weal of a freshly healed scar that cut downward across Maitland's cheek. There was a catch in his voice as he continued:

"You savee my life. My life belongee you."

From the street three stories below rose the steady tramp of heavy shoes on the cobble-paved Escolta. The military police were starting out on their nightly task of enforcing the curfew put into effect by General Otis when the first rumors of the uprising planned by Aguinaldo had been brought to headquarters. As the echoes of their passing died, a *carretela* clattered over the Puente Espagna, its *cochero* huddled low on the shafts to make room for the three buck privates of the Fourteenth Infantry hurrying down to the Cuartel Malate to answer check roll call. Through the barred windows at the rear of the loft came their voices, thrown back by the wall that encircled the old city, chanting—

Ocho y media, you vamoose,
Poco tiempo, calaboose

the ribald chorus that followed bringing a crooked smile to Maitland's quivering lips.

* * *

THE clean land breeze, carrying the elusive odor of the *ylang-ylang* flowering in the botanical garden down by the hospital, came as a grateful anodyne to Maitland's overwrought nerves, setting his aquiline nose twitching as if to rid itself of the reek that came from the room behind him. Off Ermita way, a smoky flare told of a burning nipa shack just outside the American trenches that stretched from Fort San Antonio de Abad on Manila Bay to San Pedro Macati, thirteen miles up the Pasig.

Maitland had been with his regiment when the American commander had "flung his thin brown line" along the old insurgent breastworks to hold in check the forces of Aguinaldo, angrily seeking entrance to Manila, from which they had been forced after the city had fallen. Now he was absent without leave, and what was worse, missing a pretty scrap that would extend the American zone farther toward the Laguna de Bay.

Old Poon was right. He was a —— poor soldier when the excitement of a campaign gave way to the humdrum of barrack life. He was always kicking over the traces the moment he could get within striking distance of Old King Booze, and kept on kicking until in ultimate surrender to his greatest enemy he fell happily asleep in some native *cantina*. And his latest tilt had been his worst.

He smiled grimly as he thought of the tongue-lashing he had given the little lieutenant of the military police who had ordered his arrest. The smile deepened. "Lizzie" was not exactly the name to call an officer, even if that officer was a "shavetail" with the ramrod of West Point stiffening his backbone. Nor was it quite the thing to slug the sergeant of the guard in the jaw and break arrest. Nor yet to hide out in a Chinese godown. Well, he was in a pretty pickle, and the brine would be smarting his soul before he worked his way out.

"S'pose you go legiment side now you catchee chance. You fightee like ——, mebbeso Flozen Facee forget you get dlunk, pay bobbery. You stlay here, bymby soja catchee, you livee Bilibid Plison one, ten yea'. You come along Poon, mebbeso catchee plentchee money, catchee big fight. Can do, Maitlan'?"

Ah Poon knew that Maitland would if he could. As head of the Chinese laborers that followed in the train of the American forces, carrying their heavier equipment on the march and doing the thousand and one duties that ordinarily fell to the lot of the enlisted men in camp, he had made one trip with Maitland's old regiment. Utterly fearless, he had wandered back and forth along the line before Zapote Bridge and had been bowled over by a stray bullet just as the Americans swept across to victory.

Maitland, twice wounded himself, had carried Ah Poon to the rear and had stalked into the field hospital, the wound from an insurgent bolo gaping on his cheek, his blood mingling with the red flood that poured from a wound in Ah Poon's side. Depositing the old Chinaman on the first vacant cot, he had demanded attention for him—and made sure that he got it—before he fell in a faint at the surgeon's feet. Yes Ah Poon knew Maitland, and deep in his Oriental soul he hoped to pay his friend and set him on the right track as sincerely as he hoped to even his score with General Pio del Hilar, who had left him a twisted cripple two years before.

"Can do, Maitlan'?" Again the question, accompanied by a gentle pat on the shoulder.

"Can try, Poon, old boy."

With a shrug Maitland started to close the shutters. Suddenly a blaze of light swept above the roof of the big tobacco factory three blocks away as a rocket shot to its zenith and, bursting into a hundred balls of fire, dropped dying in the distance.

Some anxious commander up the river was calling for troops.

For a moment the darkness seemed more intense. The silence of the deserted streets grew deeper and deeper, the recessive noises of the night dying like ripples until only the creaking of a heavily laden commissary *casco* against the quay that lined the river gave hint that somewhere there was movement, there might be life.

A second later an answering rocket sped skyward from headquarters, cutting the sheaf of darkness with a sickle of fire. Lights began to flicker like fireflies in the Cuartel Meisic just across the river, and in a few minutes the transport guard swung over the bridge and down the water front, their accouterments rattling as the sleepy soldiers took up the "double time."

Down on the Malecon a company of regulars was swinging along toward the quay at the mouth of the river, where they would be ferried across stream to take their places on the gunboat *Napindan*, already whistling for its crew. Off toward the waterworks a desultory rattle of musketry told of a disturbed outpost. A mounted orderly came spurring from the walled city, the iron-shod hoofs of his animal striking fire as he reined it to a halt at the end of the bridge, clattering off down the Escolta as soon as he had answered the sentry's challenge. He was carrying the latest instructions from headquarters to be distributed by the *Napindan's* commander to the various regiments strung out along the river.

"*CASCO* go uppee liver, chop, chop, my savvy. You takee one big dlink, Maitlan', we makee lide easy, allee way."

Ah Poon tugged gently at Maitland's arm and swung him toward the stairway, and a few seconds later the pair were hidden safely away under the matting roof that covered the after part of the *casco*, the canoe that they were to use later riding easily astern. They were just in time, for already the *Napindan* had pushed her blunt nose under the bridge, her captain easing her ahead until the towline, made fast in the forward bitts of the *casco*, was taut; and then, squattering like a wounded duck and stuttering like an asthmatic hippopotamus, the old vessel began its slow passage up river with its tow to be met at every outpost by a sleepy-eyed detail of soldiers awaiting their rations of bacon, corned willy, hardtack and goldfish.

Lulled by the easy motion of the *casco*, Maitland slept. Ah Poon, left to his own devices, grinned with delight as he reviewed his plan of revenge, and a beatific smile spread across his features as he thought of the way he was going to pay his debt to Maitland. He had laid his plans with care and had built up his own intelligence section from the best of the Chinese under his control. He knew that Colonel Woodley had not lost the city of Pasig that day, and he did know that General Hilar was preparing to attack again that night, for he had seen to it that word had gone to Hilar that an insurgent sympathizer would throw wide the gates of the monastery dominating that city that very night so that Hilar could walk inside and wreak his will on the handful of Americans who held his former headquarters.

Ah Poon's plans were running as smoothly as the river until the *Napindan* developed a bad case of temperament, superinduced by a frayed tiller cable, and stuck her blunt nose on a sandbar three miles below Pasig, the unwieldy *casco* bumping her in the stern with a shock that threw the old Chinaman sprawling over Maitland. In the confusion that followed no one noticed the slim canoe that shot out from behind the *casco*, Ah Poon and Maitland paddling like mad until they reached the sheltering shadows that lined the bamboo-edged banks of the river.

The moon was just rising as they drove their craft under an overhanging bank at Pateris, diagonally across the river from the town of Pasig. It had been no child's play paddling against the current in the hot summer night; and Maitland, alcohol oozing with the perspiration that leaked from his every pore, had needed his last ounce of strength to keep up with the steady stroke set by the wiry old Chinaman.

On the opposite bank the monastery rose above the town of Pasig as grim and forbidding as in the earlier days when the Spanish dons, both military and secular, had ruled the island people living in the nipa huts clustered outside its wall with a hand of steel from which the glove of velvet too often was missing. Its immense court had echoed to the tramp of sentries' feet as they paced back and forth along the top of the twelve-foot wall that surrounded it. Through its iron-barred windows flintlocked harquebuses had poured a restraining fire upon maddened hordes armed with arrow, spear and bolo.

It had been monastery or fortress as occasion demanded and sometimes both; but always its occupants had dominated the upper reaches of the Pasig and the lower regions of the Laguna de Bay. It sat like an ogre at the edge of the river, its walls and passageways splashed with brown where the blood of *tao* had mixed with that of grandee.

Ah Poon's eyes narrowed to slits as he gazed at the old pile. The Spaniard's "joss house" held no terrors for him. He had lived and sweated and suffered in the big cellar that lay beneath the courtyard, its entrance hidden in the wide-mouthed cistern that lay in the center of the court.

This cellar was the secret storehouse of General Hilar. Deep in the bottom of the cistern Ah Poon had hidden his riches when he had worked for the Spanish commander before he was ousted by Hilar. If everything worked out right he could slip across the river, enter the cellar by a secret tunnel he had dug when he escaped, rescue his gold and then turn his attention to the trapping of Hilar.

Lying quietly in the canoe, Ah Poon outlined his plan to Maitland, telling him that he had sent word to Hilar that the gates would be thrown open, and, what was more likely to bring the insurgent general hurrying to the attack, that Ah Poon's treasure was hidden in the well. Before he had finished, the rising moon was peeking over the fringe of forest that lay back of Pasig. It was time for action, and Ah Poon was ready for his big adventure. He could hear the call of the sentries across the river as they marked the passing of the midnight hour.

A light began slowly winking from the front of the building. An officer was pacing slowly to and fro between it and the window that opened from the office used by the commanding officer of the American troops.

There was a clatter of arms as the guard details were relieved. A shot was fired upstream. He heard an officer calling to the sergeant of the guard. Evidently there had been no sleep in Pasig that night. He worked closer to Maitland, already shivering in the night breeze, and handed him a squat, stone bottle.

"You takee one, two small dlink, catchee wa'm." Ah Poon lifted the cork, and the aromatic scent of high-grade *samshu* smote Maitland's nostrils. "S'pose soja no sleep, no can get inside. How can do?" he queried as he gently pulled the neck of the bottle away from Maitland's lips. "Can do?" he continued plaintively.

"Sure can do, Poon. You work upstream and make your way across above the town. Then creep down and slip into your tunnel while the guard is at the other end of the wall. When you have the gold all *out* and you want to coax Hilar *in*, signal, and I'll engage the attention of the colonel. Here's to you, Poon," and to add strength to his salutation Maitland plucked the bottle from Ah Poon's hand and drained it to the last drop.

"Dlunken bum——"

Ah Poon cut his sentence short, climbed out on the bank and made his way upstream, leaving Maitland to cross in the canoe when it was time for him to engage the colonel's attention. He forded the river a quarter mile above, worked downstream to the wall of the courtyard, uncovered the entrance to his tunnel and crawled into the cellar. It was dark as the Pit. Groping, he traced his way along the nearest wall until he felt an ancient, square-sided lantern sway to his touch.

He doffed his cap, drew from its silk-lined top a box of safety matches and lighted the tallow candle he had hidden inside the lantern two years before. By its flickering gleam he made his way through the piled-up stores, left by the insurgents when the Americans drove them out, to the cistern entrance across the cellar. With eager hands he pulled back the small door that opened into the cistern half-way between its mouth and the dark surface of the water that rose ten feet above its rocky bottom.

Above him a series of U-shaped bars set in the wall of heavy rock formed a ladder that led upward to the courtyard. Just below the door was a small ledge that the Filipinos had used as a landing-place for the munitions they had let down from above. Beneath this ledge, and hidden by it, were six stout cords of twisted rattan—chosen by Ah Poon because of their power to resist water—from whose ends hung concealed in the bottom of the cistern as many sections of the giant bamboo of the tropics stuffed with *onzas* of Spanish gold and plugged at their open end with smaller sections of cane. With their contents, these unique safety-deposit boxes weighed in the neighborhood of thirty pounds each, the total of Ah Poon's treasure amounting to nearly forty thousand dollars.

Working like a beaver, Ah Poon dragged the bamboo sections from the cistern and scuttled them, one by one, through cellar and tunnel, easing them down the bank outside the walls to lie safely hidden in the waters of the small brook that entered the Pasig a few yards away. This task finished, he signaled to Maitland, and crept back into the tunnel to take stock of the cached ammunition.

Ah Poon chuckled as he saw the cases of Mauser shells fitting the rifles carried by the insurgents. Alongside were boxes of black powder, sacked to fit the bores of the old-fashioned cannon that made up the artillery of Hilar's forces, and coil upon coil of fuse to slip down the open vents of these old muzzle loaders and ignite their charges.

He kicked at a pile of burlap hiding a case of powder. A rat ran squeaking from beneath it. He stepped suddenly backward, hitting his head against a projecting hook. His thin lips tightened and a devilish gleam lighted up his brooding eyes.

He had had no love for rats since that first night he had spent as a prisoner in this noisome dungeon. He had been trussed like a fowl by General Hilar's orders, knees and elbows drawn together above his waist, and hung by his cue from this very hook. The pain had been terrific, increasing in waves as the weight of his suspended body loosened the scalp surrounding his cue lock, yet it had been as nothing to the agony inflicted by the noxious vermin who had left the marks of their teeth on his body and soul. It had brought a sense of relief that almost drowned his shame when General Hilar, maddened by his refusal to give up the secret of his treasure, had clipped his scalp lock with a swift stroke of his saber the next morning.

With nimble fingers he cut open one of the sacks and laid a trail of powder from the case to the cistern door. On this case he piled other cases and box after box of ammunition. He next tested a short piece of fuse, taking care that no spark reached the powder. It was still in good condition and sputtered bravely along to its utmost end. He cut three pieces of equal length and braided them together, putting one end in the powder trail and tying the other to the first rung of the cistern ladder. His trap was ready. He had only to set it. He made his way up from the cistern.

Already the Americans were answering the fire of the insurgents. He moved quickly across the courtyard, shot back the bolt that held the gate and flung its panels wide. A yell from the insurgents in the rear told him that they were ready and waiting. He peered outside, looking for Maitland. He was not in sight. Ah Poon limped back to the well and dropped, rung by rung, down the ladder to the platform. With a sigh of anticipation he squatted in the open door of the cellar and lighted his pipe. The braided fuse was at hand. His trap was set and baited. He could afford to wait.

Keen eyes peering from the jungle had marked the path of the canoe from the time it had shot out from under the stern of the *casco,* had followed the movements of Ah Poon until he took to the water and had noted the point where he left the river on its opposite side.

When the word reached General Hilar that the *Napindan* with its hundred troops was stuck, he was delighted. When word came that a lame old Chinaman was working in toward the monastery, he was jubilant. Already his forces were moving across the river, closing in on the Americans. He only awaited the signal that they were in position before commencing the attack. He had only to pass the word that he wanted Ah Poon, and the old Chinaman would fall into his hands and then—well, he'd break every bone in his heathen body and pin him out on the nearest ant hill as an example to other hiders of treasure.

IN THE monastery, Colonel Woodley, his troops spread out in a half circle far beyond the outer *barrios* that clustered around Pasig, paced the floor of his headquarters hoping each moment to hear the *Napindan's* whistle. He had seen the rocket which had answered his call for men and knew that troops and supplies were on their way. For the last hour there had been desultory firing up river. Evidently the insurgents were trying out his battalion. It grew brisker, then died away.

The moon crept higher until at last it topped the walls of the monastery, throwing into silvery relief the opposite banks of the river. He fancied he saw the movement of men and the occasional glint of steel. Reaching for the big service revolver that lay on his desk, he gave its cylinder a speculative spin, catching the gleam of each brass shell as it swung past the loading latch. Thrusting it into its holster, he buckled the cartridge-laden belt around his waist and turned toward the long hall that led to the stairway opening down into the courtyard, determined to inspect the fragment of a guard on duty just outside the walls.

"Ghecko, Ghecko, Gheck-o-o-o——"

In the jungle outside a lizard began its calling. The colonel stopped in his tracks. He hated this particular reptile. Somehow or other the insurgents could imitate its call and with slight variations signal to each other. It was their Morse code and reminded him of the way the Apaches had imitated the barking of a coyote in the days when he led his company in pursuit of Geronimo in the mountain fastnesses of Arizona. He stepped back into his quarters and stood listening.

"Ghecko, Ghecko, Gheck-o-o-oo," off to the right where a lane of bamboo led to the river's edge.

General Hilar, from his point of vantage, exulted. Only a lizard could have done better. His men had won through the American outpost and were ready to attack.

The colonel turned and blew out the light that already was blackening its chimney on the table. It was still as death outside. Then a brittle twig snapped under the heel of the sentry walking his post along the quay directly under his quarters.

His taut nerves flicked for a pulse beat, and then slipped back to their even tenor. If the insurgents were preparing to attack, let them come. He had only to hold the monastery until his men outside could turn, close in on the circle they had thrown around the outer *barrios*, and catch the enemy between two fires.

"Ghecko, Ghecko-oo-oo-oooo."

This time from beneath the very walls of the monastery, thin and quavering. Ah Poon had completed his task and was signaling Maitland.

The peculiar timber of the call puzzled Hilar and hardened the conclusion in the colonel's mind that he was about to be attacked. He flung wide the oyster-shell window, thrust out his grizzled head and listened. For a moment there was no sound save the scrape of the sentry's gun against his belt as he brought his weapon from "right shoulder" to "ready."

A flash of light on the river below caught the colonel's eye. He fancied he saw the outlines of a canoe drifting downstream, close inshore. As it drew nearer he saw the dim figure of a man rise from its center, and, standing erect, with jerky motions of a paddle, try to work the nose of the craft into a clump of bamboo at the upper end of the quay.

A flicker of amusement crossed the colonel's face as the ghost-like occupant weaved unsteadily for a moment and then slumped down to his former posture. Evidently the man was white—and the man was drunk. He wondered who it could be. Then from directly beneath him came in potvaliant accents:

"Frightened, are you, Frozen Face? You gentle, bacon-loving, bean-eating, pickle-guzzling old midwife! Garrison cut down to nothing and old Pio licking his filthy chops ready to gobble you up. You don't know who I am, do you? But I'll send in my card along with Pio's, you benighted son of a weevilly hardtack, you——"

Maitland's tongue was traveling fast, but not so fast as the bullet from the sentry's gun, that clipped through his hair and put the final punctuation mark to his tirade. The roar that followed the discharge of the rifle was muffled by the water that beat against Maitland's ear drums as he tumbled sidewise into the river at the *spang!* of the bullet. Swimming under water until his breath came bursting from his pursed lips, he missed the volley of words that his irate commander fired at him, catching only—

"You —— traitorous renegade, Maitland, I'll have you shot as a spy if I get my hands on you!" which was the end of the fervid fulmination the colonel flung at the head of his erstwhile sergeant.

When he poked his head up from behind a bunch of river grass, the quiet of the night had given way to pandemonium. The insurgents, taking the sentry's shot as a signal for a general attack, had opened fire on the monastery. He could see the flashes of their rifles across the river. He could hear the explosive *zip-pse-e-e-w!* of the American Krags as the men of his regiment answered the enemy fire. He heard the colonel call his meager guard inside the walls. He thought of Ah Poon awaiting him without the courtyard, crept slowly out on the bank and began worming his way toward the rear of the building.

"Hoot, hoot, hoot. hoo-oo-ooo-t!"

Below the bend the *Napindan,* stuck on another bar, raised its bellowing voice in despair. Maitland caught its signal and wondered whether the officer in charge would wade the men ashore and drive through the insurgent lines in time to save the colonel.

He sprang to his feet, thinking to run forward in the shadow of the wall through the constantly increasing volley fire. He fell as a shower of bullets splattered against its rocky face.

A trickle of blood burned its way down his neck. He traced it to its source and felt gingerly of the gash which a bullet had torn through his scalp. Not so bad; the sentry had missed, and a stray insurgent bullet had only creased him.

He started to rise again. His muscles refused the urge of his brain. He knew it was not the paltry wound in his head, nor was it fear; it was just plain—drunk. The *samshu* had been too potent. —— Ah Poon anyway! What had he meant by flicking a bottle under his nose at such a moment? What a fool he had been to drain it to the dregs!

THE whine of a brass-coated Remington bullet followed by a scream of agony from the monastery broke through alcoholic mists that befogged Maitland's brain. He shuddered as he thought of the agonies his old bunkie, Sodenburg, passed through before he answered "taps" after a similar verdigris-laden missile had punctured his intestines only two months before.

Well, if it was going to be a fight to the death it was time he quit fooling and got into the scrap. Chinamen were all right, but if one had to walk out in the bloody stream of death it was better to wade with his own race. Crawling, creeping, stumbling, so sick that revolting nature at last freed his stomach of the poison that had held him in close embrace for the last few days, he staggered around the corner to the back wall just as the first detachment of Pio's men, under the cover of the fusillade from across the river, rushed from the bamboo thicket in the rear.

With his breath coming in gasps that threatened to tear his overladen heart from its bearings, Maitland ran staggering along the back wall. He came to the gate. It was open. He shouted for Ah Poon. There was no answer from the old Chinaman, who sat chuckling to himself as he slipped a hairy noose back and forth in the gloomy depths of the cistern.

Maitland stepped inside and swung the doors of the gate shut. The insurgents were close upon him. It was a question of seconds. He still had a chance. If he could block them a few minutes it might give the men on the *Napidan* a chance to wade ashore and take the enemy in the rear. —— Ah Poon! What did he mean by hatching any such crazy scheme, and then leaving him to hold the bag? If things went wrong it was "taps" for the colonel and his men, and he had been a party to the plot.

The lock stuck! Try as he would, Maitland could not slip the heavy bolt into place He felt the jar of the first insurgent that struck the door. He braced against it, held for a second, and was swept sidewise on his face as two score bolo men came screaming in, their long knives glistening savagely in the moonlight. Hilar was out for blood and had turned loose his wild hillmen to clean up on the Americans.

Maitland struggled to his feet, sobbing with rage. He could hear the barking of the Krags as the Americans swept the jungle borders, seemingly unconscious of the danger that was rushing upon them from the rear. Already the first of the natives in the court had mounted the stairs leading to the wooden veranda that sprawled along the rear wall of the monastery. The frenzied warriors in their first mad rush had overlooked him. Maybe he could slip out of the gate and run the gantlet along the wall to the front of the building and give the alarm.

Again the *Napindan's* whistle split the air. Her signals had been coming steadily. Instinctively he began to count. He was surprized that his tally was only fifteen seconds before it sounded again. It seemed an age since he had stepped inside the gates. It seemed years since he had cursed Ah Poon. The firing grew brisker outside.

In front of him the attackers were carrying a heavy beam up the stairway. Blood-mad, he gathered himself for the sprint that might save the day—that might lose him his life. His mouth was slavering, yet his throat seemed parched. Again the *Napindan* whistled. Another fifteen seconds gone. He turned toward the open gate, ready for the attempt. He dodged back and jumped to safety behind the door as General Hilar, followed by a dozen of his body guard, swept inside.

The attack grew in intensity, the insurgents that Hilar had left on the opposite shore taking to the water, firing as they forded the river, the steady fusillade on both flanks helping to mask the real attack from the rear.

General Hilar, his mind on the hidden store of ammunition lying beneath the courtyard and Ah Poon's treasure at the bottom of the cistern, took up his position where he could direct the attack and at the same time keep an eye on the main objects of his attempt to win back his stronghold. Already his men were swinging a heavy beam against the iron-bound door at the top of the stairway. There were no windows along the rear of the building; there was no other point where he could hope to penetrate the massive walls of the building.

He heard a volley in the distance and recognized the reports. The Americans had forced their way ashore. He shouted to the men with the battering ram to work faster.

Suddenly the door gave way, the heavy beam clattering along the passageway as its wielders stumbled forward on their faces. A second later they came tumbling forth, driven by the impact of a dozen soldiers led by Colonel Woodley. In a second the stairway was clear, the soldiers firing upon the seething mass below, kneeling behind the veranda railing, while their commander paced up and down behind them.

The natives, urged by Hilar's frantic shouts, made another dash, two abreast, up the stairway. The colonel sprang to its head and with revolver and saber broke their rush, killing the leader, the Americans picking off the less eager ones before they reached the bottom of the stairway.

A native orderly sped through the gates to General Hilar's side, carrying word that the American troops were forcing their way through the insurgent lines. He saw the end of all his plans if the Americans were able to hold the monastery until their scattered lines were reassembled. He waved the orderly away, called to his body guard to concentrate their fire on the Americans kneeling behind the veranda railing, urged the bolo men to another attack on the stairhead and stepped back of the box-like coping of the cistern.

Training his heavy revolver across the crook of his left arm, he took careful aim at the colonel. If he could down the American commander there was a chance that the leaderless men would give way before the insurgent attack. Once inside the walls of the monastery he could hold his position until he had a chance to make a safe retreat up river.

Up on the veranda the colonel moved back and forth too swiftly for Hilar to obtain a sure aim. Down in the cistern, standing on the ledge opening before the door into the cellar, Ah Poon chuckled as he watched the shadow of Hilar's head and shoulders cut across the oval-topped bar of moonlight that swept down its sides to gild the sullen waters below. Hilar was inside; the Americans were still holding the monastery. All he had to do was to spring the trap. He lighted the fuse and began to climb the U-shaped bars that led to the top of the cistern.

Maitland, struggling with the nausea that had again overtaken him, saw Hilar raise his revolver and cover the colonel. With eager eyes he sought for a weapon. There was nothing in sight, not even a loose stone. If he could only creep up on Hilar and strangle him before he killed the colonel!

Again the *Napindan* whistled. Again his stomach threatened revolt. ——, double ——, all booze! If he could only do his part now he'd never touch another drop of the accursed stuff. And as he made his vow, he knew that he would keep it. As if in answer his vision cleared, his trembling limbs steadied. Like a panther he slunk forward, his speed increasing with each step, the fingers on his outstretched hands working convulsively as if already they were kneading the muscles of Hilar's neck.

Hilar fired—and missed, his bullet zipping past the colonel's ear and plugging into the jamb of the broken door. The colonel glanced out past the screaming mass and caught sight of Hilar half hidden behind the cistern coping. He threw down on him and pulled the trigger. There was no answering report. His weapon was empty.

He looked beyond Hilar. His eyes widened, and a grin wiped the frown of battle from his eyes as he saw Maitland, the renegade who had cursed him to a king's farewell a few minutes before, sneaking up on Hilar, who had stepped from behind the coping and now stood in front of the cistern, shouting to his body guard to kill the colonel.

Hilar raised his pistol again. The colonel saw his lips tighten; he even imagined that he could see the trigger finger begin the squeeze that would loose the eager missile. He kept his eyes on Maitland, ragged, dirty, blood streaming along one side of his neck, staggering along toward Hilar. Like a catapult Maitland sprang just as Hilar pulled the trigger, the bullet from the insurgent's weapon speeding harmlessly skyward as the two grappled.

Hilar's body guard had downed five of the colonel's men. The bolo men had accounted for two more. There were only five left. The colonel saw it was impossible to hold the stairhead. He called to his men to carry their wounded and dead inside while he held the stair.

As he fought he saw Maitland, one arm around Hilar's body, attempt to jerk the revolver from the insurgent's hand. Wiry, hard as nails, the Filipino struggled to break the American's embrace. Back and forth they swayed while in front of them the bolo men and body guard fought to force the stair.

His last man inside, the colonel sprang to the shelter of the doorway. Already his men were piling the narrow passage back of it with boxes, cases, chairs, anything that would serve as a barricade. He crawled through the narrow aperture they had left for him at one end and again took up the fight. His chances were pretty slim, but not so slim as those of his old sergeant, who was locked in a death grapple with the leader of the insurgents.

A warm glow suffused him. Maitland was a man after his own heart. If they both pulled through he would give him another chance. The folly of the thought struck him, and he laughed as he shot the leader of Hilar's body guard through the heart.

Outside, the fumes of alcohol again befogging his brain, Maitland relaxed his grip on Hilar's wrist. He heard the venomous sneer of relief that came from Hilar's lips. He knew the fight was over so far as he was concerned.

He saw the sweep of Hilar's released arm as the Filipino swung the revolver at full length to bring it crashing down on his uncovered head. He set his teeth against the shock, pushing in toward Hilar with his last remaining ounce of strength. He felt the insurgent sway ever so little till his back was against the cistern coping. He shut his eyes.

The *Napindan* whistled. He heard the shouts of American troops in the distance. He heard Ah Poon call, close to hand. His eyed opened, widened with unbelief as he saw the face of Ah Poon peeping from the cistern directly back of Hilar. He saw Hilar's tunic collar tighten as Ah Poon clutched at its braided hem. He heard his last despairing call as he was pulled head down, feet up, backward into the cistern.

He saw Ah Poon jump clear of the coping and felt the old Chinaman's arms around him, urging him backward through the gate. He fell, and as he hit the ground he saw the insurgents turn yelling from the stairway. Ah Poon picked him up and ran limping through the gate. He wondered at the old Chinaman's strength. Once outside, Ah Poon dropped him like a sack and swung the big doors shut, slipping the hasp into place and trapping the screaming horde.

Again the *Napindan's* piping. He struggled to his feet. The American troops were breaking from the jungle to the right. Ah Poon ran toward them, waving them back. Then he returned to Maitland and began urging him ahead.

Suddenly the ground heaved beneath his feet. A ball of fire and smoke popped straight up from the center of the court, opening like an umbrella. Then the skies streamed with light; the stars went mad. The moon jumped from horizon to zenith. He felt Ah Poon force him to the earth and fling his body across him. Came darkness. Oblivion.

A GLIMMERING in the east. The earth settled back into its orbit. Maitland tested a finger. It moved. He was alive. He could smell—iodoform. He could taste—blood. He could see—barrack-like walls. It was broad daylight. He arose slowly.

Again the *Napindan's* piping. Slower. Sadder. He looked around. He was in the orderly room off the colonel's quarters. He walked to the window. Below in the bright sunshine of another day lay the *Napindan*, her nose pointed downstream. Grief grabbed at his heart as he saw the row of plain pine boxes that lay, covered by the stars and stripes, in orderly array on the after deck. He raised his hand in salute, his extended fingers touching the white bandages that enswathed his head.

Suddenly his throat grew parched. He desired—and the wonder grew that his desire was not for the false comfort hidden in drink.

Mess call sounded. The aroma of coffee smote his nostrils. Off to the right his old company were assembled for mess. The odor of bacon, sizzling with beans, mingled with the scent of coffee. That was what he wanted! Good old Army chow!

He turned and made his way down the long hall that led to the door opening on the enclosure. The door was gone, along with the stairway. A part of the veranda hung drunkenly across the rear wall of the building. A great crack straggled upward along the giant masonry of the building. It marked the spot where the explosion had been held in check by the sixteen feet of soft sandstone that formed its center buttress. Below, a crater twenty feet across lay in the center of the shaken walls that had surrounded the court. The gases of the explosion had followed the lines of least resistance upward through the cistern. A detail of men was working in the débris, gathering up the mangled bodies of the insurgents.

He turned back to the orderly room. He glanced at his cot. A new uniform was draped over the back of the only chair the room afforded. He saw a pair of chevrons hanging loosely near an order tacked on the wall above the rickety table.

He heard a well-known chuckle as he moved toward it. The colonel had been in the room while he was viewing the wreckage outside. The order was written in the crabbed hand of Old Frozen Face and read:

Headquarters, ——teenth U. S. Infantry, Pasig, Luzon, P. I., Aug. 1, 1899. Special Order No. 21.

Par. 1. Private Oliver Maitland, Co. A, ——teenth U. S. Infantry, for gallantry in action, is hereby released from arrest and restored to duty.

Par. 2. Private Oliver Maitland, Co. A, ——teenth U. S. Infantry, is hereby restored to his former grade of Sergeant, Co. A, to take effect immediately.

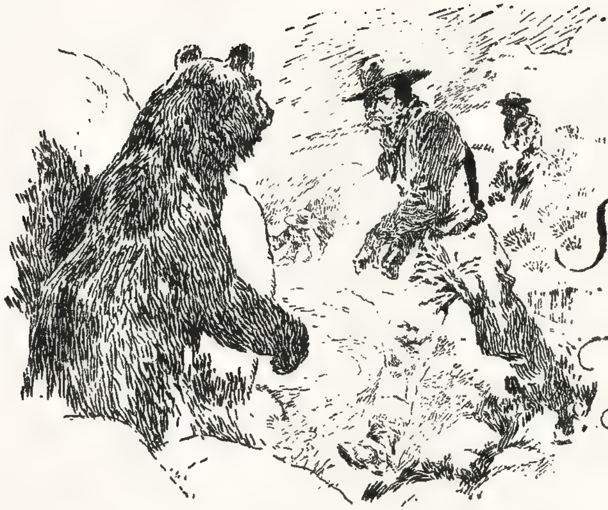
Maitland's heart swelled with joy. Only one thing was needed to make his day complete—the presence of the old Chinaman who had stuck by him through thick and thin. But where was Ah Poon? Had he gone down in the blast that had wiped out the insurgents? He dimly remembered that Ah Poon had tried to protect him from the rocks that beat down around his prostrate body like an artillery concentration. His joy changed to gloom.

He turned to the window and gazed down at the men casting from the bitts the lines that held the *Napindan*. He wondered whether Ah Poon's body was on the boat hidden by the starry flags. Grief-stricken, he knelt beside the window and buried his face in his hands.

The door creaked noisily open to admit Ah Poon. Maitland sprang to his feet as the old Chinaman limped heavily to the table and dropped a length of bamboo upon it. His eyes widened as he watched the flood of *onzas* cascade from its cracked sides to spin in golden circles around the room.

Stepping over the glittering mass, Maitland caught Ah Poon's outstretched hand. Turning, Ah Poon led him out through the colonel's office to the big window that opened over the quay. He pointed in derision to a ghastly object lodged in the topmost branches of a giant bamboo. It had once been the head and shoulders of General Pio del Hilar. Then with a smile that spread like a ray of sunshine across his wrinkled face, he chuckled triumphantly—

"Blowem all to ——, payee allee debtee, chop, chop!"



HEROES of the SQUARE X RANCH

by Thomas Topham

Author of "Grunty Shanghaies a Poet," "Too Much Magic," etc.

JIMMY CHRISTOPHER lay flat on his back under the lone cottonwood tree and dabbled a wet handkerchief across his heated brow, while he absorbed gossip about his new employer from "Big Bill" Bullock. Big Bill was an old hand on the Square X ranch.

"Yeah," said Big Bill impressively, "the old man is a square-shootin' guy, but terrible cautious. He won't stand no monkey business an' he's not keen for what you'd call fancy ridin'. He's a safety-first bird, but he'll cotton right up to any *hombre* who can heave a rope an' git his steer."

" 'At's me," proclaimed Jimmy, getting up and dipping more water from the spring. "I kin throw a rope around a corner an' git 'em, heels or horns. What's this spring called, anyway?"

"Cottonwood Spring," Big Bill informed him. "Hop out, kid, an' git them horses an' we'll ride on up the cañon an' see if them locoed cows has landed there. I'll show you some more things about the ranch that'll come in handy, if you stay."

Jimmy arose leisurely, dropped his cigaret and ground out the fire with his foot. He hitched at his overalls, straightened his jumper and put on his hat, then stumped in his high-heeled boots around a large rock that hid him from the spring and started for the horses.

A short interval of time elapsed and Jimmy came loping back toward the spring. He waved his hat frantically at Big Bill, yelled something, and continued running.

"Hey!" called Big Bill, dashing out after Jimmy. "Hey! What's matter?"

Jimmy paused long enough for his companion to catch up. Big Bill grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Bear," said Jimmy succinctly. "Big 'un. Lemme loose."

"Keep your shirt on," counseled Big Bill, and still clutching Jimmy, he looked back over the route Jimmy had traveled. A big bear was sniffing around the rock.

"Almost run over him," gasped Jimmy, "an' he riz up on his hind legs an' made a swipe at me. 'At's what comes of the boss not lettin' us carry guns. —— of a ranch. I'd fight him with a gun, but barehanded? Not me. Not even a rope handy."

"Ca'm yourself," again counseled Big Bill, "an' watch. Now, don't run away."

Big Bill walked down toward the bear. The bear watched him cautiously, swinging his head from side to side. As Big Bill came near, the bear reared up on his haunches.

Big Bill walked up, reached out a hard hand and slapped the bear across the nose. The bear dropped to his feet, grunted disgustedly and turned around. Big Bill planted a couple of boots on the bear's rear end, and the bear made off with haste, growling a little and looking back sidewise much like a dog that is being sent home.

"Heroes of the Square X Ranch," copyright, 1925, by Thomas Topham.

The big cowboy turned a grinning countenance back to his companion.

"How's 'at for gittin' rid of a bear?" asked Big Bill as Jimmy Christopher came up rather shamefacedly. "I always do bears that way. Hit 'em a crack acrost the nose an' then boot 'em off the trail."

"Aw," said Jimmy, a light breaking on him. "That ain't no wild bear. You can't tell me. I lived in a bear country. Why, I've roped bears——"

"Sure," said Big Bill soothingly, seeing that Jimmy was nettled. "I forgot to tell you about 'Buck.' That bear's Buck, an' he's the old man's pet. Old man ketches him when he's a teeny cub an' raises him by hand. Then he turns him loose an' Buck refuses to quit. Hangs around down here in the cañon an' goes up late every night to the cookhouse to git the leavin's. Don't many folks know he's here, because he keeps pretty well outa sight."

Jimmy spat disgustedly.

"I suppose," opined Jimmy, "that Buck takes a fat calf whenever it suits his fancy."

"Wal," replied Big Bill a little dubiously, "the old man says he don't, an' leastways he ain't never been caught at it, so I guess he stays. Seems to keep pretty well fed an' if he's a smart bear he'll lay off them calves an' live easy."

"Well, I'll git the horses," said Jimmy, and, boldly shooing Buck out of the way, he retrieved the two animals.

TWO days later, when Big Bill Bullock and Jimmy Christopher, the new hand, returned to the ranch house, there was high excitement.

There was a girl at the Square X!

"Chick" Evans told them about it while he dug out a long forgotten pair of chaps and dusted them by beating them vigorously on the floor.

"—— of a ranch," grumbled Jimmy Christopher. "Here I come way off up here expectin' to git some real cow-punchin' an' run into tame bears an' gals——"

"She's some gal," interrupted Chick. "She's got a nose — oh, boy! what a nose——"

"An' freckles," said Jimmy.

"Yeah, freckles; cute li'l' freckles," agreed Chick ecstatically. "An' eyes——"

"Like twin stars," supplied Jimmy.

"How'd you know?" demanded Chick, peering suspiciously at Jimmy in the half-gloom of the bunkhouse.

"Ha!" said Jimmy wisely. "An' hair? I suppose she's got hair?"

"Yes, she's got hair—real hair," declared Chick, his enthusiasm rising again.

"Bet it's bobbed," said Jimmy.

"By gum, you've saw her," said Chick, "an' you're tryin' to kid me. All right, hop to it, kid. I'm out to win this Jane. She's a ravin' beauty, to my mind."

Chick parked a derby hat atop his sunburned locks, buckled on a large Mexican spur, adjusted his chaps more becomingly, knotted a red handkerchief around his neck and with a glance at a wrist watch stepped out and swaggered toward the ranch-house. Plainly Mr. Chick Evans of the Square X ranch was sallying forth to make a hit.

He came back soon, accompanied by the boss. Old John Kelso, owner of the Square X, was herding Chick as if he were a wild steer.

"You don't come that on me," raved the old man. "You go right back in the bunkhouse an' chuck that top-piece. You'd better burn it up. —— good thing I ain't allowed no guns around here, else some of the boys'd 'a' shot that hat plumb outa the county, an' I wouldn't 'a' blamed 'em much at that."

"Aw, Mister Kelso," pleaded Chick, "you can't tip a flappin' hat——"

"That's it," stormed the boss. "I mighta knowed that gal'd put foolish notions in your head. You take off them chaps, too. Ain't no use for chaps around here, specially in the evenin's. Overalls is plenty good enough for a cowpuncher."

Chick morosely took off his finery and went forth again, grumbling. Jimmy Christopher and Big Bill Bullock followed curiously.

Seated on the front gallery of the ranch-house was the girl. Maye Matthews was not, as Chick Evans had so eloquently described her, a raving beauty. Her nose tilted toward the sky even when she looked down; her eyes were large and a rather faded blue; her hair, like most hair of the Southwest, sunburned; her skin more leathery than peach-bloomy.

But she made up for it all by her vivacity. She fairly bubbled and her quips both amused and abashed the cowboys who hung around her like a swarm of flies. Jimmy

Christopher fell an easy victim to her charm.

"Oh, you're the new hand," cried Maye when Jimmy was gravely "knocked down" by Chick Evans. "Uncle John told me about you. He said you could rope faster and better than any man he ever saw. I'm a little afraid of you."

"You needn't be scared of me. I don't rope no heifers," said the modest Jimmy. "I throw 'em with my bare hands."

His gallant speech brought a guffaw from the others. Maye blushingly accepted the compliment, and Big Bill Bullock was shoved forward to stammer a "pleased to meetcha." The girl eyed Big Bill coolly, appraisingly, and promptly put him at his ease.

* * *

OUT there in the cool evening Maye held court and talked and bantered with her admirers. John Kelso, the boss, sat awhile listening to his bubbling niece and then turned in. He needed his eight hours' sleep. His young bucks might do with less, but he was getting old.

Maye was from one of the Southwest towns, a city girl in the eyes of the cowboys. Her ideas of life had been acquired mainly from the movies. She talked extravagantly of the movie heroes.

"Aw," spoke up Chick Evans, "them cowpuncher heroes in the movies ain't so much. They jest dress up fancy an' do a little rough-ridin'——"

"Oh, they're wonderful," declare Maye. "Cowboys of the movies are picturesque—the real thing a little dirty and inclined to awkwardness."

There was an uneasy shuffling on the gallery as if a couple of the real thing were inclined to defend their dirtiness and awkwardness, but they let it pass.

"It's the heroes we admire, we girls," Maye rushed on as her hearers sat rapt. "Be a man ever so good, unless he can stand out in some heroic deed, he's of the common herd, he's dust."

"Hero?" asked Chick. "What'dya call a hero?"

"One who does some brave thing," declared Maye. "Not necessarily a big deed, but brave. A man who climbs a mountain never climbed before; one who fights danger in any form; yes, a man who rides an outlaw horse is a hero. Conquerors all."

Tad Jones guffawed.

"Like to see you play the hero 'round here," he said. "Your uncle has canned all that stuff. Won't even let us pack guns or break mean broncs. He's sure discouragin' when it comes to rough stuff."

"He'll make cowards of you all," cried Maye hotly. "I'd not stand for it. I'd be —I'd be heroes anyway."

And that was why they picked Chick Evans off the corral fence the next morning, one arm dangling uselessly and his head half caved in.

"How come you try to ride that old outlaw anyway," sternly demanded the old man when they had finished washing the blood off Chick and setting the bones of his arm. "I told you boys not to try to ride him. You didn't git mixed up an' rope him in the dark, did you?"

Maye hovered about breathlessly. She smoothed Chick's hair while her uncle talked, and every man there would have traded places with Chick, broken arm and all.

"I say," repeated Kelso, "how'd you come to climb on that old outlaw?"

"Dunno," replied Chick, and grinned up at Maye. "Jest git a notion I could ride 'im an' clumb on."

"You've played ——," said Kelso disgustedly, "an' you'll be laid up jest when you're needed with the roundup comin' on."

Old John Kelso was frankly puzzled when they carried in Tad Jones two days later with his shoulder broken.

"By gosh, I clumb 'er," said Tad through set teeth. "Plumb to the top an' I'd 'a' been all right if I hadn't slipped over that cliff comin' down."

"What was it you clumb?" asked Kelso.

"Old Baldy," said Tad, and he gritted his teeth and smiled at Maye, who hovered about, patting his grimy face, "an' that old mountain ain't never been clumb before, but I conquered her."

"The only reason she ain't been clumb before is that nobody ever see any sense in climbin' her," said Old Man Kelso. "Two done up," he added bitterly, and rambled out to the gallery, thinking and smoking.

Big Bill Bullock was sitting on the steps.

"Bill," remarked the old man as he tapped the ashes out of his corncob pipe, "what in the ——'s gittin' into this gang of mine. Here we used to have the sanest, smoothest crowd of men I ever see, an' suddenly they all go wild."

"Dunno," said Big Bill.

"Where'd you find Tad?" inquired Kelso.

"Oh, he spread it around he was goin' to climb Baldy," Big Bill told his boss. "When he didn't git back last night we git worried an' start out to look for him. We find him at the bottom of a fifty-foot cliff where he'd tumbled over."

"If Tad hadn't been with me five years an' never before showed signs of insanity I'd fire him," declared Kelso. He abruptly changed the subject—

"How do you like the girl, Bill?"

"Who?"

"Maye," said Kelso.

Big Bill shifted his position on the step.

"All right," he remarked casually. "Yes, she's all right. Got funny notions, like most gals, but all right. Yes, she's sure all right."

"Hoped you'd like her. She's about the only relative I've got left," said Kelso in an off-hand way, and stepped back into the house.

IT WAS noon the next day when wild whoops and yells brought everybody about the place to the front of the ranch-house. Chick Evans and Tad Jones both hobbled out.

The assembled crowd soon recognized "Dusty" Perkins. Dusty was astride his horse and had at the end of a rope a protesting and vicious maverick of many years' standing. Dusty was partly leading and partly being led.

The old renegade steer was a historic figure on the ranch, and Kelso, after several disastrous attempts to round him up, had given orders that he be left alone. He had planned to shoot him some day, to remove him as a temptation to his cowpunchers, who were forever talking of roping the animal.

Dusty had succeeded in roping the wild steer, no mean job in itself, and had then led him to the ranch-house, a performance worthy any cowpuncher. He brought the outlaw animal around the ranch-house in a series of wild dashes, his horse expertly circling and ducking as the steer lunged around.

Cheers greeted Dusty's feat in spite of the boss' orders against snagging the old range master. The steer accommodatingly fell down and lay panting, and Dusty, seizing the opportunity, brought his horse to a spectacular stop. He removed his hat with a flourish and waved it gaily at Maye, who was a pop-eyed spectator of the proceedings. Dusty was getting ready to say a neat speech to the effect that his feat was merely a poor effort to prove that men of the Square X ranch were not all cowards, when his neglected victim staggered to his feet and discovered that his life's ambition was very near realization. By a super-effort the maverick lunged forward and caught Dusty's horse with a long and sharp horn.

The horse went out from under Dusty so suddenly that the unprepared cowboy was left sitting in the dust, still foolishly waggling his hat. Caught directly in the path of the now dragging and struggling steer, Dusty was tangled, kicked, squelched, rolled on and otherwise mistreated.

They untangled Dusty and carried his unconscious and bleeding form into the house, with Maye hovering about him. Kelso drove twenty miles for a doctor, cursing all the way over and back. The doctor's report put him in a worse humor. Nothing much the matter with Dusty except four broken ribs and eighteen or twenty painful cuts and bruises. With good nursing by Maye he might be riding again in a month.

"Three good men gone to ——," complained Kelso to Big Bill Bullock. "Not a one of 'em was doin' anything useful. Bill, what'm I goin' to do about this. I suppose you'll be the next."

"Huh," said Big Bill. "Ketch me doin' any fool stunts." And, lighting a ready-made cigaret, he ambled off.

"NICKER" HENECKE wasn't so badly hurt when he tumbled out of a tree, up which he had shinned by throwing a rope from limb to limb. A broken foot and an ear almost torn off summed up his injuries. Nobody wanted the eagle's nest he was after, only somebody had said it couldn't be brought down.

Old man Kelso waited until Nicker was around again; then he knocked him over the cook's soap kettle when he happened on Nicker suddenly and his wrath overcame his usual good nature. Maye soothed Nicker's wounded pride by calling him a hero openly and aroused the intense jealousy of "Teeny" Williams, who went out and tried to rope a coyote. He might have got the coyote if his horse hadn't stepped into a gopher hole. The doctor took eight stitches in Teeny's scalp where it collided with a rock and gave the opinion that Teeny would, in time, recover from the concussion of the brain that resulted.

Old man Kelso was driven to profanity and harsh words.

"By crickety," he swore at his crowd of invalids, "of all the —— fools, you folks take the cake. I wouldn't be surprized to hear any day that one of you had tried to kiss a rattlesnake. Well, I'm payin' you wages to work an' I'm willin' to keep a man on the roll indefinitely when he gits hurt doin' something legitimate, but I'm goin' to stop this foolishness. Here I've practically only got Jimmy Christopher an' Bill Bullock able to crawl around."

Jimmy Christopher hung his head in shame, for Maye was listening. Heroes all, these men, in her eyes, and he a miserable coward unable to think up some heroic deed, however small. He stalked off and saddled his horse, with the vague idea of undertaking an adventure. If he could rope a nice five-prong buck and take it to Maye —now, that might be worth doing. Still, bucks were hard to handle on the end of a rope. He had had one that way once, and had been terribly glad to get loose from it. Moodily revolving schemes in his head, he rode back by the house and Maye hailed him.

"Whither away, Sir Knight?" called Maye gaily.

"Dunno," said Jimmy morosely, suspecting derision in the Sir Knight.

"May I go, too?" asked the girl.

"Sure," said Jimmy, and went back to saddle a horse for Maye.

They met Big Bill Bullock as he was riding out the gate.

"Whither away?" called Maye.

"I'm whitherin' down to Cottonwood Spring," replied Big Bill gravely. "Gotta git a bunch of cows outa there over acrost the ridge."

"Where's Cottonwood Spring?" asked Maye. "I've never been there."

" 'Bout five mile down the cañon," said Big Bill.

"We'll go, too," chirruped Maye, and the three rode off.

It was pleasant at the spring. All three alighted and sat down to rest.

"Aren't the boys the bravest things?" bubbled Maye. "Uncle John's furious, but I think they're too dear for words. Why, they'll dare anything. Just suggest it, and off they go."

"Yeah," said Jimmy, a smoldering light in his eyes. "Suggest something to me."

"Oh, no," twittered Maye. "You must think up something yourself—something unique. I'm sure you could do the bravest things—if you only tried."

Jimmy sat back against a rock and squinted his eyes in deep thought. Big Bill leaned against another rock, dozing. Jimmy's eyes caught a waving of the brush. At first he thought it was a steer, then a moment later saw it was a bear. He watched the bear come into full view. The girl saw it at the same time. With a little gasp she was on her feet. Jimmy caught her by the wrist. Evidently Maye had never heard of Buck. A daring thought flashed over Jimmy. If no one had told Maye of Buck, here was his chance to be a hero and put Buck to rout. It was worth trying. Jimmy glanced at Big Bill. Big Bill was peacefully sleeping, propped against his rock in the shade.

"Be still," Jimmy hissed in Maye's ear, and bounded lightly forward toward the bear.

Buck uprose, as he had been trained, to meet the cowboy. Jimmy drew back his hand and smacked Buck across the nose, then raised a foot in preparation to administer a swift kick as Buck skedaddled away. He heard a terrific roar, then something hit him, then darkness.

JIMMY awakened late the next afternoon in a darkened room at the ranch house. Old John Kelso was sitting anxiously beside his bed.

"What—what happened?" asked Jimmy weakly.

"Sh-h-h-h. Be still," cautioned Kelso. "You're all right. Doc says when you come to you'd be all right. But Buck certainly did hit you a powerful wallop."

"That's what comes of tryin' to be a hero," lamented Jimmy bitterly. "Honest, I thought you could slap that bear an' git away with it."

"Sure you kin, generally," said Kelso. "I don't blame you none atall, son. If I'd a known you aimed to slap Buck, I'd 'a' told you to lay off him for a while. You see, Buck he got to foolin' around a skunk trap the cook set the other night an' gits his nose ketched in it, an' it was jest the wrong time to slap that bear."

"What'd he do?" asked Jimmy. "Seems like I went to sleep sudden."

"He slapped back," almost chuckled Kelso. "An' he slapped hard, but he didn't mean no particular harm. It musta hurt him fierce when you hit that sore nose."

Jimmy reached up and felt cautiously of a bandaged jaw and shoulder.

"What became of Maye and Bill?" he asked.

Kelso coughed.

"We-ll," he drawled, "you see, it's this way. Maye says Bill's the biggest hero she ever heard of, even in the movies. 'Why,' says Maye, 'Bill he jest run down there an' kicked that ragin' rampagin' bear outa the way, an' rescued Jimmy right outa the jaws of death.'

"But shucks," chuckled Kelso, "that's a joke on Maye. Buck's out there now back of the cook-house havin' the cook put vaseline on his nose, an' Bill an' Maye drove over to the county seat this mornin' to git married after the doc said you'd be all right."

BETRAYER OF LA SALLE

by Eugene Cunningham

ROBERT CAVELIER, Sieur de la Salle, made his last voyage to America in 1684 to establish a French fort at the mouths of the Mississippi, as first of a chain of posts planned to extend to Canada and so force out the Spanish who claimed the country.

By accident La Salle landed on the Texas coast, and, after nearly three years of mishaps, mutiny led by the notorious Duhaut and the surgeon Liotot ended with the murder of La Salle on March 18, 1687.

Duhaut had as servant a boy of sixteen, Jean l'Archévèque. It was this youth who stood on the riverbank and when La Salle came over to inquire for his nephew—already murdered—gave insolent answer to the commander and led him on to where Duhaut and Liotot were ambushed in the tall grass. After the murder, l'Archévèque seems to have withdrawn from Duhaut and so escaped the vengence visited upon Liotot and Duhaut by the freebooter, Hiens.

It has been generally known that l'Archévèque, with a sailor named Grollet who was accessory to La Salle's murder, and some other Frenchmen, remained in Texas with the Indians until ransomed in 1689 by the Spaniard de Leon. But even so well-informed a historian as Parkman long believed that l'Archévèque and Grollet, sent from Mexico to Spain for examination concerning French aims and accomplishments in America, died in the galleys.

In 1888 Adolphe Bandelier, the noted archaelogist, stumbled upon the remnants of the archives of the Franciscan Order in New Mexico, in the pueblo of Santa Clara. He found mention, as Spanish soldiers, of l'Archévèque, Grollet and Pierre Meusnier. L'Archévèque was "Captain Archibeque."

On leaving the military service he became a trader or pedler, and an important man in New Mexico, trading south of Sonora, visiting Mexico City. As a soldier of two services he was invited to sit in Spanish councils of war.

In 1719 he married for the second time—taking a daughter of one of Mew Mexico's first families. He was prosperous. At forty-eight the fates seemed to have forgotten his youthful treachery.

In the Spring of 1720 Governor Cosio despatched an expedition to establish friendly relations with the Prairie Indians of Kansas. L'Archévèque had advised prompt action to forestall his countrymen, the French. Pedro de Villazur commanded the party. "Captain Archibeque" was of Villazur's staff.

The expedition came to the Arkansas River and found there a camp of the Pawnees and with them several Frenchmen. The Pawnees attacked the Spanish, routing them, killing many. Jean l'Archévèque died there, on August 16, 1720, his wedding anniversary, killed by his own countrymen or their Indian allies.

THE FLAME

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by L. Patrick Greene

Author of "Blood and Fire," "Play Ball," etc.

IT WAS the Feast of Candlemas. The place was in darkness save for the dim altar light which illumined with its pale, blood-colored rays the red-robed acolytes who stood motionless, waiting expectantly, large, unlighted candles in their hands.

Beyond them, on either side of the chancel, appearing ghost-like, stood the white-robed choristers—and they, too, held unlighted candles.

In the nave of the church, and in the aisles on either side of the nave, the pews were filled with men and women. The altar light did not penetrate beyond the chancel steps and the presence of the worshipers was manifested by rustlings, subdued whispers and nervous, throaty coughs.

At the chancel steps stood two incensers, swinging the censers to the right and to the left; bowing, turning to the altar, swinging again, then turning back once more toward the nave. The soft clanking of the chains, the regularity of the swing was hypnotic in its effect: From the censers poured a white cloud of fragrant smoke which floated wraith-like upward until, meeting with a cross current of air, it drifted beyond the chancel and dissolved in the darkness of the nave.

An organ boomed softly. The vibration of its low pedal notes rattled a pane of glass somewhere at the rear of the church: A high-pitched, nasal voice intoned a prayer and the "amen" of the people sounded like heavy surf breaking on some distant, rocky shore.

The organ throbbed louder, louder—an obligato to the clear voices of the choristers; the incensers swung the censers in wider arcs, the silvery clanking of the chains blending with the chant yet seeming something apart, like some alien mysticism; the smoke poured forth in still greater volume.

A bell tolled—three sharp, incisive strokes. The singing stopped on a high, triumphant note. The organ played on, softer, softer, until it became only a faint murmur, felt rather than heard.

Again the bell tolled and then, from somewhere high in the roof of the chancel, a beam of light flashed downward and focused upon the officiating priest, who was kneeling at one side of the altar.

His vestments—the scarlet hood and gold-embroidered stole; the lace-edged surplice and purple cassock—made a barbaric splash of color against the white altar cloth.

He rose now, turning slowly toward the nave, his hand upraised in benediction. His long, clean-shaven face was that of a fanatic; a smoldering light glowed in his close-set eyes. With an impatient, nervous gesture he brushed back a lock of his flaming red hair which had fallen down over his forehead.

He took the candles from the acolytes

and ignited them at the altar light, then knelt again in prayer.

The altar-boys genuflected and passed down the chancel. Coming to the choristers they lighted the candles of the first two—one on the right; one on the left—and presently the chancel was ablaze with light as the flame jumped from candle to candle. And out, beyond the chancel, a rippling wave of light ran along the pews as each worshiper in turn lighted his candle from the light handed down from the altar.

The organ trumpeted the introductory bars of a recessional hymn and the choristers, followed by the incensers, the acolytes and the priest—he looked neither to the right nor to the left but, with set face, his lips slightly parted, gazed fixedly ahead, walking as one in a trance—marched slowly down the center aisle to the vestry.

The door closed behind them. Again the nasal voice was raised in prayer, muffled by the closed door and the thickness of walls.

The service was over and the people filed slowly out, carefully shielding the light of their candles from the night breeze that they might complete the symbolism of it all and take the "Light" out into the world.

"A beautiful service," whispered one, as if fearful of breaking a spell; her plain, homely face lighted by rapturous excitement. "And to think that tomorrow dear Father Miles sails to carry the Light to the heathens of Darkest Africa!"

TROOPER DIXON must have been day-dreaming, or the pot of native beer he had emptied at the kraal of Piso, added to the heat of the long African afternoon, had dulled his senses. There could be no other explanation of the careless way in which he permitted his sleepy-eyed horse to halt at the muddy, insect infested water hole and guzzle greedily.

In further proof of the policeman's lack of alertness, he swung one leg over his horse's neck so that he sat side-saddle, loosed his hold of the reins, balanced his rifle on the saddle beside him, rolled and lighted a cigaret and puffed in lazy contentment, allowing the smoke to curl about his nostrils. And when, presently, the horse raised its head, pricked up its ears and looked about inquiringly, its nostrils quivering nervously, Trooper Dixon only cursed softly.

"You blamed old fool," he chided. "What's put the —— wind up you now, eh?"

But his voice failed to soothe the horse. With a snort of terror the beast suddenly leaped forward, splashing muddy water in all directions, and galloped swiftly away, its head held high and half turned to see what evil might be pursuing it.

"Aw, ——!" swore Trooper Dixon who had landed with an explosive *plop* in the thick mud at the edge of the water-hole. "A —— of a tsetse must have bit the —— "

Laughing sheepishly at his ignominious fall, Dixon gingerly sat up, relieved to find that he had broken no bones, inwardly congratulating himself that no one had witnessed his careless horsemanship and lack of veld craft.

His chief concern now was the recapture of his horse and the discovery of his rifle. The horse was headed in the right direction and Dixon hoped that it would stop to graze, giving him a chance to catch up with it before it got to the store of "Big 'Un" Isaacs. Dixon did not relish the "leg-pulling" Big 'Un would give him should he arrive at the store on foot.

The mud with which he was covered from head to foot would soon dry—was almost dry now—and could be easily brushed off. So that was all right. His rifle— That must have fallen into the water.

He rose to his feet and, stooping over, groped about in the muddy bottom, feeling for his rifle. Presently he straightened himself and, cursing softly, batted viciously at the cloud of sharp stinging insects which swarmed about his head.

Then, becoming conscious of a strong, pungent, animal scent, he bent down again and with almost feverish haste recommenced his search for the rifle, his head turning constantly, his eyes searching the bush about him.

Presently there was a soft crackling in the undergrowth, a padding of thick cushioned paws. With a muttered curse, Dixon backed softly out of the pool, his eyes fixed on a little clearing on the opposite side, hoping that the tree toward which he was backing would prove an easy one to climb.

Dixon had reached the edge of the pool, when his feet slipped from under him, failing purchase in the slimy mud, and he sat down with a suddenness which knocked all the wind from his body.

At the same moment a lion came slowly out of the tangle of bush into the clearing opposite, and padding arrogantly down to the water drank greedily, its eyes fixed unblinkingly on Dixon.

It was mangy and very thin, save that its belly seemed to be abnormally distended. Porcupine quills stuck out of its jaws: And only a very young lion is foolish enough to tackle a porcupine—either very young or very old; when they are old they are often maneaters too.

It raised its head and yawned and Dixon could see that its teeth were worn down almost to the gums—could smell its fetid breath.

Dixon sighed with relief when the beast lowered its head and drank again, but he did not move. Despite the carelessness which had put him into this predicament, Dixon was an experienced hunter and fully veld wise.

"This is a —— of a mess," he thought. "I'm as helpless as a two-year-old. Only time in my life I've ever wanted to be a porcupine or—or a bloomin' polecat. At that I must stink like one. This mud. . . . ——! The old blighter can hold a lot of water. Must be Friday, or perhaps he's had a lot of salt ham. But he couldn't get that. Isaacs don't deal in ham. Perhaps he'll go away when he's drunk enough—and I sit still. ——! There's a million mosquitoes dining on my nose. To —— with the lion."

He slapped his face and then, alarmed at his foolhardiness, froze.

The lion crouched, its head on the ground between its front paws; its tail, sticking up straight, the tufted end curving slightly, quivered as if affected by the vibrations of his deep throaty growls

"He's going to spring," thought Dixon and planned to throw himself face downward in the pool at the same moment the lion started his leap. And then . . . after that . . . he didn't know. . . .

"Keep still—don't move," a deep, powerful voice commanded sharply.

Dixon grinned; he knew that voice.

The growls ceased and the lion crept forward a pace, its belly almost touching the ground.

There was a crackling in the bush to the right and the lion turned its head suspiciously, snarling, its nose wrinkled, its lips drawn back from yellow, rotting teeth.

A loud, deafening report followed and the lion shuddered at the impact of a heavy bullet, rose up on its haunches and batted the air feebly with saucer-big paws.

Another shot: Again the convulsive shudder and the lion leaped forward—a final, vain effort—falling with a splash in the center of the water hole, its outstretched paws almost touching Dixon. Its tail thrashed weakly and its whole body quivered with the exertion as it stretched out its hind legs and strained to get nearer Dixon. It roared once, then was silent and did not move again.

"The first shot was good enough, Big 'Un," the policeman shouted as he rose stiffly to his feet and, an expression of disgust on his face, picked off the leeches which were clinging to his legs.

"Are you sure, Dixon?" boomed the voice, and from the bush a man emerged holding an old elephant gun almost as big as himself at the ready.

His head was thrust forward and he peered short-sightedly through thick, strong-lensed glasses first at the lion and then at Dixon.

"Sure he's dead, Big 'Un."

Dixon did not look up from his task. He did not care, just yet, to meet the twinkle of mirth which shone in the little Jew's black eyes. First he wanted to compose a story which would explain how he got in such a fix and not leave him open to ridicule. And the story had to be hole-proof; would have to hold water under a close examination. He knew Big 'Un.

"Sure he's dead," he repeated slowly. "The wind from that pom-pom of yours is enough to kill any self-respecting beast—let alone the charge. Why don't you get a decent gun, Big 'Un?"

"It's a good gun, ain't it? An' I'd have no trouble finding it if I dropped it in the vater. An' so——"

Dixon looked up sharply, regarded Isaacs quizzically. But the other's face was guileless.

"Better put your helmet on," Isaacs advised, "an' if you're all through paddlin' we'll go up to the store—unless you'd rather stay here an' fish!"

"Oh, you go to the ——," Dixon said affectionately as he retrieved his helmet and shook off the mud and insects which were clinging to it. "Should think you'd show a little sympathy to a man who's nearly been chawed up by a lion. Why, if I hadn't slipped off my horse, quick as ——, when that yellow —— sprang out of the bush I wouldn’t be talking to you now. And, Big ’Un, that was a leap, let me tell you. He cleared my horse with a foot to spare.”

He put on his helmet and pulled it low down over his forehead with a sharp tug and watched Isaacs who, his eyes fixed on the ground, carefully circled the water hole.

“Vonderful beast it must have been,” he announced presently in tones of mock awe. “Oy! What a shame it was to have killed it. He takes off here for his spring and clears Dixon’s horse by a foot and then, without landing or turning, comes back to the place he started from. Oh, vonderful!”

Dixon bent over and picked off a few leeches he had previously overlooked.

“You yap too much, Big ’Un,” he growled, angry at himself for not having concocted a better story. “Come on in here and help me find my rifle.”

“But you’re *sure* he’s dead?”

“Couldn’t be deader,” and Dixon raised the massive head with the toe of his boot, then let it fall again with a *plop*. The beast looked like a badly-cured, moth-eaten skin which had been discarded by some meticulous housewife at a spring cleaning.

“Vell, if you’re sure,” Isaacs said slowly and leaning the big gun carefully against a bush, rolled up his baggy white trousers above his knees—exposing spindly, slightly bowed legs—and waded gingerly into the muddy pool, avoiding with feminine fastidiousness the blood-tinged froth which floated here and there on the surface of the roiled water.

“There’s your rifle,” he exclaimed presently.

Dixon turned and saw his rifle perched precariously in a bush overhanging the water hole.

“I didn’t think it cleared the water when I threw it,” he mumbled as he moved sluggishly over to retrieve it. He picked it up and examined it carefully; relieved, yet not surprized to find it undamaged—the Lee Enfield service rifle is made to stand much harder knocks than a mere fall into a clump of bush.

He worked the bolt three or four times, finding some comfort and relief from the strain he had just experienced in its smooth working and sharp *click-click*. He still kept his back toward Isaacs; he did not want that man to see that his hands were shaking.

And then a loud, menacing snarl sounded directly behind him.

With an oath he wheeled quickly, opening the magazine cut-off, loading the chamber as he turned. The rifle was at his shoulder, his finger on the trigger—but he faced only Isaacs who, his hands cupped about his mouth, grinning broadly, again imitated the snarl of a lion.

“You vas so sure he vas dead, Dixon,” Isaacs said with a chuckle.

“You’re a —— fool, Big ’Un,” Dixon said shortly and turning swiftly strode up the path along which his horse had galloped less than ten minutes previously.

“HE didn’t like my little joke,” Isaacs muttered regretfully. “Vell, vell! An’ now I must myself remove this vermin—this eater of little ones.”

Stooping, he took the lion by the tail and, straining hard, endeavored to pull the carcass from the pool. A little, a very little, he shifted it and then his feet slipped on the muddy bottom and he sat down violently.

He tried to rise to his feet but, in some inexplicable way, his legs had slid under the lion and, practically helpless, he sat there, a comical look of dismay on his round, red-cheeked face. After a little while he began to laugh—a shrill, high-pitched laugh which was infinitely more in keeping with his puny physique than his deep, booming voice. He was still laughing when Dixon, ashamed at his display of temper and loss of self-control, returned to the water hole.

“What are you doing, Big ’Un?” he asked. “Washing your breeches?” Then, seeing that Isaac still held the lion’s tail and was jerking it spasmodically, he burst into a gale of laughter. “Oh, I see,” he gasped finally, “you’re playing horsey.”

“Vell, vot of it?” Isaacs said good-humoredly and, letting go of the tail, shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands to express more forcefully his indifference to his situation. “But mark you, Dixon,” and he shook his forefinger at the policeman, “my horse will not run away.”

“I’ll be good,” Dixon said humbly. “Don’t rub it in. But what are you trying to do, anyway?”

“I vanted to pull the *schelm* out of the vater and bury it, an’ I slipped an’ somehow my foot got caught an’ I can’t move.”

“That makes us quits, then, Big ’Un.

We both keep our mouths shut about this little *indaba*, eh? Is that a go?"

Isaacs shook his head sadly.

"But you looked so foony, sitting there in the vater and the lion vatching you," he said regretfully.

"That's as may be," Dixon countered swiftly. "But I'm out of it and you're not. An' you look —— funny yourself. However, if you want to talk about it—go to it. Only, I'm not going to be on hand to hear it. Tell it to the mosquitoes and leeches. They'll appreciate it."

He turned slowly away, a broad grin on his face.

Isaacs struggled furiously to free himself and failing, called:

"Not so fast, Dixon. I didn't say I vouldn't keep my mouth closed."

Dixon halted and turned about.

"And you haven't said you would. Well?"

Isaacs hesitated, swallowed hard, then in tones of deep disappointment:

"Vell, I vill. But it's a pity. It vould have made the boys laugh—you looked so very foony."

With something suspiciously like a sigh of relief—he knew that if the story ever got around he would never be able to live it down—Dixon returned to the pool and taking hold of the lion's tail heaved it off Isaacs and dragged it out of the water; Isaacs, scrambling to his feet, making awkward, ineffectual attempts to help.

"Let's get to the store and have a sundowner," Dixon said when he had dragged the carcass a goodly distance from the water hole. "Better pull off those bloodsuckers first, though."

"Oh, them! They keep a man from getting too hot-headed."

Nevertheless, despite his tone of contempt, Isaacs hastily followed Dixon's suggestion and then rolled down the legs of his trousers. They were wet and, clinging to his legs, accentuated their deformity.

Althogether, Isaacs cut a very ludicrous figure as he stood there, grinning sheepishly as he picked constantly at his mud-streaked trousers, endeavoring to keep them from coming in contact with his skin; his vivid green-and-purple striped silk shirt billowing, making him look as if he were dressed for a masquerade, as if he had chosen to disguise himself as a pumpkin.

From the front of his long-vizored, cloth cap, which was pulled down to his outstanding ears, a lock of black hair had escaped and curled about his forehead. He blew at it continually to keep it from falling down over his eyes.

"Come on," Dixon said impatiently. "I'm getting a chill."

"Vait. I vant to bury the beast first."

"Bury it? What for? Gone crazy, Big 'Un?"

"No," Isaacs said slowly and very gravely. "I vant to give it a Christian burial——"

"That's good, coming from you," Dixon chortled. "And since when have lions been Christians, anyway?"

"Vell, you see, it's like this: This—" he indicated the lion with a jerk of his head—"has been feeding around here a long time. A calf now and again; an' goats—oy, so many goats! Then the night before last he broke into my cook-hut and tried to take Moses—you remember Moses, my cook-boy?"

Dixon nodded.

"Vell he chewed a bite out of Moses' shoulder but he couldn't carry Moses avay—that boy is too heavy an', anyway, Moses hit him hard on the nose and the lion did not like that. But last night he went to the kraal of Tela and took a piccanin'. An' that was a smart little fellow; always top of the class at the mission school. An' so——"

Isaacs stopped and began to heap stones over the carcass, Dixon silently helping him.

Soon the lion was completely covered by a heap of stones which protected it from the scavengers of the bush—the vultures which had swooped down and were perched in the near-by trees, croaking harshly, and the jackals and hyenas whose presence was indicated by a snarling and growling in the bushes.

"Now let us go," Isaacs said. "Maybe when the missioner hears of this he'll count it to my credit."

HE LED the way back to the water hole where he took up and shouldered his heavy gun, then on to the trail which wound its way up the side of a hill to his store three miles away.

Dixon followed silently; wondering that Isaacs should show such concern about a nigger brat, then realizing that it was just the attitude Isaacs would take. The storekeeper's nickname was not ironical; there are bigger things than physical perfection.

For half a mile or more they plodded on in silence. Then, at an abrupt turn in the trail, Isaacs stopped and waited for Dixon to come level with him.

"I've been on the spoor of that beast since morning," he said heavily. "The missioner, he wouldn't come. He doesn't like me: I drink an' I smoke, and I swear at my 'boys' maybe, sometimes, an' I close my store on Saturdays. An' anyway, he vas too busy telling the people of Tela's kraal that the lion had come to them because they did not all go to church on Sundays. *Ach!* such foolishness!"

"You're —— right," Dixon said forcefully. "If I had my way, all missionaries would be strung up or kicked out of the country."

"Nunno! Not so bad as that, Dixon," Isaacs reproved him mildly. "Some missioners, like this one, yes, maybe. I try to help him, to tell him things about the people. But he vill not listen; he looks at me as if I vas a dog. An' he tells the people things about me, so that some do not come to me any more when they are in trouble or have the belly ache from drinking too much beer. Ah, vell——"

He broke off with a sigh, then added with a chuckle:

"Oy! But you did look very foony."

Dixon grinned.

"I'd have looked still funnier if you hadn't turned up with that blunderbuss of yours. Beats me how you manage to fire the blamed thing. It must have a —— of a kick."

Isaacs rubbed his shoulder ruefully.

"I bet I'm all black and blue. Never fired it twice in one day before."

Dixon laughed.

"Here, let me carry it."

He slung his own rifle across his shoulder and took Isaacs' elephant gun away from him, deaf to that man's expostulations, and carried it at the trail.

"Now we can walk faster," he added and moved on with a long, slouching stride so that Isaacs had to break into a jog-trot in order to keep up with him.

"You're very strong, Dixon, ain't you?" he said admiringly, looking up into the policeman's face.

"Strength—that's about all I've got," the policeman agreed a little bitterly. "No brains, else I wouldn't be serving on the force for a lousy five bob a day."

"I'm still looking for a man to help me with the store," Isaacs said tentatively and sighed when Dixon made no reply.

Presently they came to a clearing in which was situated a kraal. The huts were larger and more substantial looking than the usual native huts of the district; there was a semblance of order and the place was scrupulously clean. Whitewashed boulders lined the course of the path through the village.

"You've done a good job here, Big 'Un," Dixon commented. "Our police boys' huts are not kept in better shape."

Isaacs beamed.

"You say that every time you come. It vas hard work. You know. These people do not mind dirt. Fifteen years I have lived here and all that time I have tried to make them clean. And yet, if for one moment I turn my back— Ach! Look at that, vill you?"

He pointed to a small heap of offal outside one of the huts at the entrance to the village.

"Mabele! Come out here, you lazy one," he called in the vernacular, speaking fluently.

A young woman came to the door of the hut; in one hand she carried a small shovel, in the other an old calabash.

"Yes, master. Did you call?" she asked demurely.

Naked, save for a bright-colored, gaily-patterned cloth which was wrapped about her under her breasts and falling nearly to her knees, she was very comely—even when judged by white man's standards.

"Yes, master," mimicked Isaacs in pretended rage. "You know I called, and you know why. That filth there: Is it not my order that no offal must be left inside the kraal? Must I tell your husband to beat the laziness out of you?"

The woman looked at the heap with well-simulated surprize.

"How did it come there, master? This morning I made all clean about the hut. But no matter. It shall offend no longer. I will take it away at once."

She knelt down and scooping the stuff up with her shovel dumped it in the calabash.

"Master," she said softly as she worked; she did not look up at him, her lips barely moved. "My husband makes a mock of me. To his second wife, Selele, he gives cloth and all manner of beads. To me—his head wife—he gives nothing save blows. And so my life is made a burden. The blows are nothing—that is his right—but Selele taunts me from the rising of the sun until its setting. Further: He talks of putting me on one side because the *umfundisi* has said that it is evil for a man to have more than one wife."

Isaacs scowled.

"Tomorrow I will talk with him and if you come to the store in the morning, you shall have cloth and beads that will make Selele's look like a bush-woman's dowry."

As he finished the woman looked up and smiled her thanks, then placing the calabash on her head, she rose slowly and walked gracefully away.

"An' the missioner would put long, ugly dresses on that body," Isaacs commented sadly. "Yet what evil is there in it?"

"She's a —— good looker," Dixon said absently.

This last reference to the missionary reminded him of the duty on which he had been sent.

Isaacs looked at him shrewdly.

"They're all good looking," he said. "At any rate," he amended, "they're all vell-ribbed, healthy animals. An' that's a lot. But that Mabele, now. Vasn't she smart? She vanted to talk to me. She couldn't come up to the store because her man vould know she'd told on him. An' she couldn't call out to me, because the other wife would hear an' listen. So she leaves the dirt outside her hut and vaits—knowing I'd pass by some time soon. Oy, a clever voman." Isaacs chuckled. Then he swore and exclaimed distressfully:

"An' I promised to give her beads an' cloth! I'll be ruined! It's a bad business, this store-keeping, I tell you, Dixon. There is no profit in it."

Dixon smiled. His knowledge of Isaacs extended over a period of years.

As they walked on through the well-ordered kraal, Isaacs was greeted with affectionate respect by the men and women they met. Occasionally a naked, pot-bellied little urchin would run to him and feel confidently in his pockets, crowing with delight when he succeeded in extracting lumps of sugar of which Isaacs carried a seemingly inexhaustible supply.

As they came to the end of the kraal and emerged into the bush once again, they met an old graybeard, the headman, who told them that Dixon's horse had come to the place and that he, himself, had taken it up to the store.

"That was well done," Isaacs said.

"*Baba,*" said the old one and clapped his hands.

Isaacs and Dixon passed on and when they had gone some twenty yards, Isaacs said casually, as if on an afterthought, not raising his voice:

"Tell your people, old one, that the *schelm*, the child-eater, will roar no more at night. He is dead."

"*Au-a, baba!*" The exclamation floated back to them surprizingly distinct and Dixon, turning, saw the old man squatting on his haunches by the side of the trail, clapping his hands together.

FIFTEEN minutes later the two white men topped the rise on which, splendidly situated, stood Isaacs' store and living quarters.

The store itself was a large, stone building with high walls and thatched after the fashion of an English country cottage. It resembled the well-appointed coach house of a large estate, rather than a store where the business of exchanging trade truck for the produce of an uncivilized people was carried on.

The wide porch which encircled it commanded a magnificent view of the surrounding country.

Set apart from the store were a number of well-built huts, the doors and windows of which were tightly screened. "Boys," wearing white shirts and white duck trousers supported at the waist by a green cummerbund, passed to and fro about their tasks: One filling a small tank, which stood on a platform outside one of the huts, with water; another hurrying forward with towels which he hung on a rack close to the platform; still another brought out two canvas-backed deck chairs and a small table on which he placed two glasses, a bottle of whisky and a siphon of soda-water.

Dixon looked at the bottle greedily. He passed his hand slowly over his eyes; his vision was blurred; his lips were blue and his teeth chattered slightly.

He shook his head and stiffened himself, trying to concentrate on what Isaacs was saying.

"You know your way about, eh, Dixon? Your hut's over there—" Strange how far away the voice sounded. "Just got time for a shower and change an' have a sundowner before skoff. I'll send a boy with some clean clothes for you. They'll fit tight, maybe. These Makalanga don't grow men as big as you."

"Thanks, Big 'Un. You're a good scout," Dixon said thickly and stumbled clumsily toward one of the huts.

He nearly fell as he came to the door of the hut—would have fallen had he not managed to grab hold of one of the pole uprights. He stood there, swaying drunkenly, cursing softly under his breath; his legs, apparently, unable to obey the command of his brain. And soon, he knew, his brain would cease to function normally for a time.

Isaacs, who had been looking wonderingly at him, now came running quickly, berating himself because he had been so slow in realizing what was the trouble with the big man, and putting his arm round his waist led him gently into the hut, pushing him down on to the comfortable bed.

"This is —— foolish," Dixon muttered and attempted to sit up and unroll his cloth puttees. But Isaacs placed his hand lightly on Dixon's chest and the big man fell back with a groan and commenced to shake violently.

Isaacs went to the door of the hut, shouted an order and then, returning to Dixon, undressed him quickly.

A boy came running with a basin and a can of warm water. He helped his master sponge and dry the policeman and wrap him in a thick, fleecy blanket.

Then he squatted on the floor beside the bed and watched, with monkey-like curiosity, Isaacs dose the sick man with quinin and phenacetin.

"You will watch him closely," Isaacs ordered. "When he sweats, call me."

The native nodded and Isaacs, knowing that there was nothing else he could do at present, that the fever would have to run its course, went to his own hut.

Twenty minutes later, having bathed, shaved and changed into a clean suit of white duck, he sat down to a tastily-cooked, well-served meal.

Just as he had finished, the native who had been left in charge of Dixon called him and he went to the hut, finding the policeman sweating profusely. He rubbed him vigorously with a rough towel, wrapped him in another blanket, then dismissing the native, sat down in a chair just outside the hut and smoked a large, green cigar, trusting to its pungent aroma to keep the mosquitoes away.

The sun had set while he was having skoff and now all light was fading rapidly from the western sky; as he watched it went out completely and the darkness of Africa cloaked him as with a heavy mantle.

Stars appeared—myriads of them—and the sky shimmered phosphorescently with their glow; looking like tiny pin-pricks of light in a deep-blue velvet curtain.

It grew cold. A native brought him a large overcoat and tucked a plaid shawl about him. A heavy dew fell; the cold, raw wind made soft, rustling noises in the tree-tops.

Lights flickered about the store—the native laborers were putting things away for the night. Presently the lights disappeared and the natives lined up before their master, giving him an account of the day's happenings, receiving orders for the next day's labors. Isaacs' attitude toward them was that of a stern, understanding father toward his children. Some he praised, others he condemned; to this one he promised reward, to that one punishment.

His instructions completed, the natives filed quickly away, babbling happily. All but two of them—who had been ordered to stay and take care of the sick man—took the path which led to the kraal below.

The darkness was absolute. The storekeeper was alone and the red glow of his cigar spasmodically illuminated his face as he puffed in lazy enjoyment.

The moon rose and tiny points of light dotted the valley below, marking the location of kraals. Monotonous, savage drum beats punctuated the silence.

A rooster crowed, then squawked as if panic stricken at his untimely bugling; he was reproved by the confused, sleepy clucking of hens. A bull lowed mournfully; from a distant kraal sounded the shrill insistent yapping of half starved mongrels. Then all was still again save for a low drone from the sick man—the malaria was taking its well established course and Dixon's temperature was mounting rapidly—and the beating of the drums.

The moonlight grew stronger, bathing the valley in its milk-white radiance. It changed the mist clouds to silver lakes and the landscape became a crazy-quilt pattern in which there were no half-tones, no delicate shadings, no compromise between black and white. And that is Africa!

"Poor old Big 'Un," Dixon was muttering deliriously. "He's got to go—he's got to go. Poor old feller. The missionary says he's got to go. Poor old Big 'Un. —— missionaries . . . She's a good looker. He's got to go."

Over and over again he repeated this in a monotonous sing-song and Isaacs bit savagely on the end of his cigar, then rose and entering the hut, lighted a candle, shading it carefully so that its gleam would not disturb the sick man, and stood by the bed—listening.

But Dixon said nothing that could give Isaacs a better idea of what was on the sick man's mind and, shrugging his shoulders, he snuffed out the light and went outside again, pacing nervously up and down. Once he paused by the table and poured himself a stiff drink which he gulped hastily. As he turned away his coat caught on the edge of the table, upsetting it. One of the glasses smashed and nearly a quart of Scotch soaked into the ground. Isaacs absently righted the table, placed the empty bottle on it and resumed his nervous pacing.

"Why should I bother about what Dixon's saying? It don't mean nothing," he muttered finally. "It's just crazy talk. He's got a temperature. He don't know vot he's saying."

He returned to his chair and wrapped himself up warmly just in time to hear Dixon say:

"I looked so foony. ——! And there was the lion with his belly full of the Big 'Un and a face like the missionary, and ——"

The voice trailed off into an incoherent babbling which quickly changed to loud, raucous snores.

Isaacs smiled and lighted another cigar.

* * *

THE moon rose higher; the drum beats increased in volume and intensity. Occasionally weird cadences of song sounded above the beat of the drums; a tune which had its origin, perhaps in the chants sung by the priests who helped Bareto, and the other Portuguese Conquistadors of the sixteenth century, to conquer the Land of Ophir; or, it may be, the tune was older than that: It may have had its origin in the hymn of worship sung thousands of years ago by the priests of Baal.

The sound of it and the rhythm of the drums quickened Isaacs' pulses—it was the Semitic appealing to the Semitic—and spitting out his cigar he sang the chant softly, a peculiar metallic timbre in his voice, and he clapped his hands, instinctively keeping time to the beat of the drums.

His voice grew louder, the hand-clapping more sharply defined—a rapid, staccato beat—and his eyes glowed strangely. He appeared to be totally unconscious of his surroundings.

And so he did not hear the patter of hoofs coming up the trail and did not see the horseman ride out from the bush into the clearing.

The newcomer drew rein not many feet from where Isaacs was seated, and sat watching the man.

The moonlight was not kind to the horseman. It gave his sharp-featured face a look of hardness, of cruelty. His nose, arching slightly, looked like the beak of some predatory bird. Save for his clerical collar and a wide-brimmed pith helmet, he was dressed in black.

The horse neighed, catching the scent of Dixon's horse, but Isaacs made no move; apparently he did not hear it. The horseman, pursing his thin lips in disapproval, spurred a little closer so that his shadow fell almost at Isaacs' feet. It was a grotesque, distorted shadow.

Suddenly Isaacs saw it and the chant ended abruptly in a confused gurgle, his hands fell limply to his side.

He leaned forward in his chair and ogled foolishly at the shadow, his mouth agape. Then he relaxed, slumped back in his chair and chuckled softly.

"Such a fright you gave me, Mister Miles," he said, looking up at the horseman. "Von't you off-saddle an' have a drink?" He added in hasty confusion, "Oy! I forgot. You don't drink, do you? How about a cigar?"

He took a handful of cigars from his pocket and, carefully selecting one, rose and offered it to the missionary, returning the rest to his pocket.

"I don't care to smoke," the horseman replied coldly. His voice was thin, nasal.

Isaacs shook his head sorrowfully, bit off the end of the cigar and chewed thoughtfully on it.

"I hoped you had come over for a nice, sociable talk," he said as he returned to his chair.

"No. I came over to talk with the mounted policeman. I wanted to see if he had performed his duty."

The voice was a torture; its vibrations were like those of the E string of a violin when scraped by a novice with an over-rosined bow.

"Where is he?"

Isaacs indicated the hut behind him with a jerk of his thumb. From it came sounds of stertorous breathing.

"He's in there. You won't be able to talk with him, though—he's sick. Got fever. Foony how quick it takes these big fellows."

"You mean he's drunk." It was a flat assertion, not a question.

"No. 'Pon my honor he ain't," Isaacs expostulated. Then, as the other looked at him contemptuously, disbelievingly: "Say, vot kind of a man are you, anyvay? Don't you believe nothing?"

The other cleared his throat with a dry, rasping cough.

"Dixon was perfectly well when he left the mission this afternoon—well and sober. I shall report him to his captain."

He dismounted and walking over to the table picked up the empty bottle.

"I suppose this was full when you started drinking?"

"It vas—but I spilled it all. I only had one drink. Dixon didn't have any: Not that a bottle of whisky 'ud make *him* drunk. He's a hard case. But he's got malaria, I tell you."

Again the snorting cough of contemptuous disbelief. Isaacs ignored it and continued heatedly:

"A lion sprang at him when he was watering his horse back there—an' he knocked Dixon in the vater. It was the maneater an' Dixon had to lay in the vater for a long time, until the lion vas looking the other way. Then he crawled to his rifle and shot the lion. That is what brought on the fever so quick; laying in the vater all that time. He ——"

"Don't lie any more," the missionary interrupted. "Some natives told my interpreter that you shot the lion. I'm glad the beast is dead, but sorry that *you* killed it. I suppose you'll capitalize it by posing as a great hunter and the guardian of these poor heathens ——"

"Nunno," Isaacs interposed hastily. "I make no talk about my shooting. They all know I am no hunter. I can only shoot straight when I am very close. An' not always then."

THE missionary waved his hands arrogantly.

"As if my task were not hard enough without having to overcome your evil influence. Why some of the poor, deluded souls speak of you as if you were a god; and you foster the delusion and grow rich on the tribute they pay you."

"It's not as bad as that, mister," Isaacs said placatingly. "They don't think I'm a god. They know I'm only old Joseph Isaacs, who is always ready to buy at a good price anything they vant to sell. I'm just a sort of father to them—that's all.

"You, see, mister, I've lived here fifteen years an' I know 'em well. An' I'm ready to help you, if you'll let me. I can tell you things. There's a lot of things about these people that no other white man but me knows. And there's a lot of vays a man vot don't know can make enemies of this people. I told you not to paint your barn red—is it my fault they burned it?"

"You were there—you didn't try to stop them; you know the names of the natives who did it, but you won't tell me so that I can report them to the commissioner and have them punished."

"It was too late to stop them, mister. And—" Isaacs rose to his feet; his deep voice boomed accusingly—"your crime was greater than theirs. When you painted your barn red, you insulted their gods—and their religion is older than yours, older, even, than mine—and put them in fear of eternal damnation. They only burned your barn." Isaacs shrugged his shoulders; then, "Why von't you let me help you, mister?" he asked plaintively.

The missionary laughed.

"Don't be childish—or are you being cunning? Even if you were in every other way desirable, how could *you*—Joseph Isaacs—help Paul Miles?"

"A Joseph helped carry the Cross," Isaacs muttered in a low voice, but the missionary heard him and his eyes flashed angrily.

"Yes," he said with great bitterness.

"Blasphemy is to be expected from you."

Isaacs stirred uneasily, his brows knit as he watched the missionary return to his horse and swing himself up into the saddle.

The two men looked at each other; the missionary struggling to control his temper and to refrain from doing physical violence to the little man who smiled wistfully at him.

A strong, moisture-laden breeze suddenly sprang up. It carried with startling distinctness the burden of the chant and the hollow beat of the drums.

"That infernal drumming," cried the missionary. "It is the devil's music."

Isaacs did not answer, it is doubtful if he heard. He was clapping his hands together and humming softly.

The breeze ceased as suddenly as it had arisen: The kraal noises became only dull murmurs.

Isaacs came to with a start.

"Vot did you say, mister?" he asked confusedly

"What I said is of no consequence—" there was righteous indignation in the missionary's voice—"it will only amuse you. But I'll repeat it. I said, 'That infernal drumming is the devil's music.' "

Isaacs made a gesture of protest.

"It is the devil's music," the other repeated firmly, "and you—you revel in it. You're a disgrace to your color; you are more heathen than the most degraded of these people. It is you, and your influence, that encourages them to persist in their idolatry; it is because of you that my task is so difficult. With you out of the way I could convert all the people in this district to Christianity in less than a year."

"Loud words—hard words to prove, mister," Isaacs murmured.

"I don't have to prove them to you," the missionary snapped. "I say that you are a force for evil in this district. The way you encourage them in their savage rites is sufficient proof of that."

"Vot does it matter, mister," Isaacs expostulated excitedly, and his voice became thicker, guttural, "as long as they keep the law, vot they call their god? Jehovah, Christ or Kabulu Kagora? Vot does it matter whether they worship with drums—or incense?"

The missionary snorted wrathfully.

"It is a waste of time trying to argue with you. But you won't be here much longer to act as a stumbling block—do you hear? I'm going to have you out of the district before long, if it means that I have to drive you out by force myself."

He wheeled his horse sharply, sending a shower of dirt over Isaacs.

"That's no idle talk," he shouted back over his shoulder. "If you're wise, you'll get out at once. Tell the policeman I want to see him again as soon as he's sober."

"He's not drunk, I tell you," Isaacs bellowed almost tearfully. "He's sick; he's got malaria. Come in and see him."

"I don't want to see him. Don't forget to give him my message if he's a friend of yours."

He turned into the trail and was gone.

Isaacs sat for awhile, brooding.

"Vot a man," he muttered. "He treats me as if I was dirt, an' calls me names. But then—" he shrugged his shoulders—"he don't matter; he's young an' he's got a lot to learn. I'll have a talk with the bishop next time I see him. Perhaps I'd better go back to Salisbury with Dixon before it's too late. A man like that can make a lot of trouble. I——"

Dixon, awaking from sleep, called feebly and Isaacs rose swiftly from his chair and entered the hut, ready to minister to the sick man's wants.

MEANWHILE the missionary had come to the kraal below the store and, drawing rein just before he came to the clearing, halted behind a disused grain hut, and watched the natives as they whirled in frenzied gyrations about an enormous fire built before the headman's hut.

Their voices, which had been mellowed by distance, sounded harsh, rasping; the tune resolved itself into something unmusical, a slurring thing of half and quarter notes, totally incomprehensible to a white man's ear. Only the beating of the drum was not changed; louder, of course, and its barbaric rhythm intensified.

As he watched an expression of sorrow softened the hard lines of the missionary's face, but it quickly passed and was replaced by a look of grim determination.

Presently he was joined by a meek, undersized native who wore a long, black cassock which trailed on the ground behind him; it was very dirty and smelled vilely.

"I could do nothing," he said in a piping falsetto, enunciating each word with formal exactness. "It is hopeless. I told them it was a dance of demons, that the song was evil. But they would not listen to me. They threw filth at me and—" he rolled his eyes fearfully—"threatened me with their assegais. The servants of the white man, Isaacs," he added with a quick, sly glance at the white man, "were the ones who threw filth at me."

The missionary quickly dismounted.

"Here, John," he said tersely, pulling the bridle reins over the horse's head and giving them to the native, "hold the horse. Wait here until I come back."

"Where are you going? What would you do?" the native asked apprehensively.

The white man gestured toward the scene of revelry.

"I'm going to stop that," he said briefly. "I'm going to put a stop to that devil's music."

The native tried to stop him, placed a restraining hand on his arm.

"But, sir, Mr. Miles," he expostulated feebly, his teeth chattering with fright. "They will kill you. They will be very angry. They will throw filth at you. They——"

The white man gently removed the restraining hand.

"I shall do what I said I would do, John," he announced grimly. "They will not harm me. You stay here until I return."

He strode forward—a grim, implacable figure.

As he passed one of the huts he picked up a short-handled hoe, the kind used by the women when they cultivate their corn plots.

Some of the natives on the outer fringe, catching sight of him, paused for a moment from their dancing and looked at him wonderingly until the beat of the drums forced them on and he was forgotten.

He took up his position behind the two drummers and watched them silently as they beat the hollow stems, over the openings of which the skin of an elephant's ear had been stretched. They looked up at him questioningly, exchanged a few whispered, mirth-provoking comments, then applied themselves to their drumming with renewed vigor, their eyes on the dancers.

For some time the missionary remained motionless; almost the only indication that he was a living thing was the rapid rise and fall of his chest as he breathed heavily; his eyes were fixed, slightly glazed, and his hands gripped the handle of the hoe so tightly that the knuckles showed white.

Presently he began to rock gently from side to side, his mouth gaped wide and he made weird noises, like those of an inexperienced ventriloquist trying to create the illusion of a mannikin singing. He stamped his feet, tentatively, like a dancer trying to catch the tempo of an unfamiliar tune.

The drummers looked up at him and smiled knowingly. One of them shouted to the dancers—

"Look at the *umfundisi!*"

The missionary ceased stamping, shivered as if he had been suddenly doused with ice-cold water, shook his head violently and then rubbed his eyes.

The words *umfundisi*—and he understood so few native words—had awakened him.

"God!" he breathed prayerfully. "God!"

Then, his eyes blazing fiercely, he stepped forward and stood between the two drummers. Letting the hoe fall from his hands he raised them above his head in an appeal for attention.

"Stop!" he cried hoarsely.

But, save that a few scowled at him, no one heeded him.

"Stop!" he cried again and his voice cracked, rose to a high, feeble squeak.

Some laughed then—but the beat of the drums quickened.

Stooping swiftly, he seemed to be endowed with superhuman strength at that moment, the missionary took the two drummers by the scruff of their necks and hurled them violently to the ground. Before they could recover themselves he picked up the hoe and smashed through the skin tops of the two drums; picked up one of the drums and threw it clear over the heads of the dancers into the heart of the fire.

And then his strength seemed to leave him and he stood there, swaying weakly, gasping from his exertions, and glaring at the people waited for the breaking of the storm which would surely, he thought, come after this ominous calm: For, with the cessation of the drumming, the people had all seemed to be petrified, as incapable of movement as if they were held rooted to the ground by some powerful electric current.

Long seconds passed—the people swayed restlessly.

And then the missionary turned his back on them and walked slowly away.

"*Au-a!*"

The ejaculation burst simultaneously from a hundred throats and the natives surged forward, shouting, cursing, threatening.

But the missionary did not look back, neither did he increase his pace: His footsteps did not falter although he momentarily expected to feel the sharp burning bite of an assegai. Had he looked back he would have seen that ten white-clad natives, their duck trousers supported at the waist by green cummerbunds, had placed themselves between him and the natives of the kraal. And each white-clad one had an assegai in his right hand, poised ready to throw. They formed a barrier which none of the others dared attempt to surmount.

Coming to the place where he had left the native teacher, John, the missionary found that that timid soul had tethered the horse to a tree and had disappeared.

Smiling, the missionary mounted and rode away, happy in the thought that he had scored a notable victory over evil; confident that he had been saved from death at the hands of the savages he had outraged by divine interposition.

Perhaps he had—through the agency of Joseph Big 'Un Isaacs!

"VOT'S the matter, Dixon? You got fever coming on again?"

Isaacs looked anxiously at the big trooper as he wearily dismounted and climbed up the steps leading to the *stoep* which surrounded the store and slumped down dejectedly in a deck chair. He looked pale under the tan and his face was drawn, his eyes sunk in their sockets. Three days of fever pull a man down, leave him very weak.

"I told you," Isaacs went on, "to rest a bit longer. You have no sense; you should have stayed in bed a day longer. Mister Missionary Miles could have vaited or, if he was in such a hurry, he could have come here and seen you." Dixon did not answer and Isaacs said firmly: "You're going to bed now. I don't vont a dead bobby on my hands. If you vos dead, who'd arrest me?"

Dixon stirred impatiently. His eyes were fixed on the native who was leading his horse away to the stables at the rear.

"I'm all right," he said irritably. "I'm not going to bed—and what's this talk of arrest, anyway? Who's talking about arrest?"

"No one—yet," Isaacs replied complacently. "But you vill soon, I expect. Vell, I'll be ready. It 'ud be so foony to be arrested by you, Dixon."

"Oh, you go to ——, Big 'Un."

"An' you go to bed, my boy. Come on!"

Dixon shook his head stubbornly.

"No! I'm all right, only," he hesitated, "only talking with that —— fool Miles gave me the hump."

"So? He gives me the hump, too, because he von't talk to me."

"You ought to be glad, Big 'Un," the policeman said bitterly. "But, I say, what do you know?"

"Vot do you mean—know about vot?"

"About me arresting you?"

"Nothing, my boy. Only—the night you came down with the fever the missionary came over to see you. He would have it you were drunk, so he was very angry with me an' said a lot of things I don't think he meant."

"Such as?"

"Oh, having me kicked out of the district."

"He meant it," Dixon said heavily.

Isaacs looked at him curiously, then smiled.

"That is very foony."

"Not so —— funny at that, Big 'Un. He's got it into his head that you're a bad egg and— Look here: Did you sell a nigger named Mali some whisky?"

"Nunno, of course not," Dixon nodded in happy relief, "but I gave him some."

"What in —— did you do that for, Big 'Un? You ought to have known better. You know the penalty!"

"Sure I know it—but vot do I care about that? Mali, he vos bitten by a snake and I cauterized the place; I cut a big gash in his thigh and then burned gunpowder in it. It must have hurt like ——. So I give him a drink to pull him together."

"Oh, is that all! Wish you'd told me all that, an' what the missionary said to you the other night, before I went over to see him today. It 'ud have helped."

"I did not think it was any of my business, so I did not tell you. But that's all there is to this whisky selling business."

"Maybe it'll be too much. The missionary's been playing up to Mali and the nigger'll swear to anything he's told—an' he says he bought whisky from you lots of times. You'll have a —— hard job proving you didn't."

"I von't have to prove I didn't. They'll have to prove I did," Isaacs reminded the policeman.

"Anyway, Big 'Un, Miles has reported you, officially, and, on the face of the evidence, I've got to arrest you. So, I warn you that anything you say—and all the rest of it."

Isaacs beamed.

"It's foony—being arrested. So that's Mister Missionary's first move, eh?"

"He's got a lot more moves up his sleeve, Big 'Un. I don't see why you don't get out and let him go to blazes. You don't have to keep store—I know that. Bet you lose money every day. Come on! Sell out your bloomin' store. He won't bother about this —— fool charge if he's sure you're out of his way."

"Nunno!" Isaacs shook his head gravely. "I'll stay here. The people 'ud miss me—an' I'd miss them. But, listen: Do all the other moves he's got up his sleeve depend on lying niggers?"

"Yes. But he's not as bad as that sounds. He's so sure that you're a bad egg, and so anxious to get rid of your influence, that he's fooled himself into thinking that all the lies his worm of an interpreter tells about you are true. For instance: His interpreter told him about that woman Mabele you gave the beads and cloth to the other day. Result: He jumps to the conclusion that you have several nigger women."

"He's a foony man," Isaacs said slowly.

"——! Is that all you can say about him? I think he's crazy, Big 'Un!"

"A little, maybe, in some vays. But he is young and they shouldn't have put him in a district like this before he knows the language and something about the people."

Dixon nodded in agreement.

"Maybe he'll learn, Big 'Un, unless he gets killed first. He's crazy, yes, but he's no fool, when he forgets his mission. An' he's got guts. If he'd shown funk the other night your boys would never have been able to save him."

"They vouldn't have tried," Isaacs said quietly. "But he didn't an' he stayed just long enough an' walked away just as he should have done. That's vot makes me think he'll learn to know the natives well—in time. You couldn't have done it better, Dixon, and you're an old timer. He's got the feel of things. He'll learn quick, as soon as he opens his ears an' knows ven to shut his eyes. An' he's got guts. That's why I'm going to stay here an' help him."

"But you'll have to go in with me first—under arrest for selling liquor to natives," Dixon said exultantly. "That'll give the boys a treat."

"Oy!" Isaacs shook his head slowly. "But I vish I had not promised to keep my mouth shut about the lion."

Dixon grinned.

"I think I'll put handcuffs on you," he said dreamily. "Leg-irons too, maybe. But don't worry, Big 'Un, the judge'll probably let you off with a warning seeing as it's your first offense and considering your record."

"But you ain't going to take me in handcuffed," Isaacs remonstrated, a quaver in his voice.

"Yes, I am." Dixon was hugely enjoying Isaacs' alarmed expression. "You're a dangerous degenerate—whatever that is—criminal."

"But you von't handcuff me, Dixon. I von't go if you do. I don't vant to see you make a fool of yourself." Then he added innocently: "You've got the evidence, eh? You've got the drink of whisky I gave Mali so long ago. You'll show that to the judge, eh?"

Dixon looked crestfallen: He had overlooked that very important factor. Of course he had no evidence—could not prove that Big 'Un had given the native whisky. He swore softly. He had looked forward to taking Isaacs in under arrest, knowing that the judge would throw the case out of court without hearing the evidence; Isaacs was too well-known, the work he was doing in the district too valuable for the court to place any credence in the accusation of the missionary.

Still, it would have been a great joke on Isaacs and a lesson for the Rev. Mr. Miles. But he couldn't go through with it now. If he appeared at headquarters with such a poorly presented case, the joke would recoil on his own head.

"Oh, ——, Big 'Un," he growled, "let's forget it. When'll skoff be ready?"

Isaacs glanced up at the setting sun.

"Half an hour. Have a sundowner?"

"Can a duck swim?"

OUTSIDE the skoff hut two natives were in hot argument, and one of them had a high, piping falsetto voice; Isaacs and Dixon looked inquiringly at each other across the table and then the storekeeper beat a tiny bronze gong which stood on the table beside his plate.

The bickering outside ceased and one of Isaacs' white-clad servants entered and stood silently behind his master's chair.

"What was the trouble, Tikkey?" Isaacs asked sharply.

"The 'Voice' of the *umfundisi* wants to talk to you, master."

"To me? Not to that one?" he nodded toward Dixon.

"To both of you, master."

"Tell him to wait until we have had skoff."

"I told him that, but he said that his need was great. And so you heard much loud talking. And a blow was struck."

"Did he hurt you?" Dixon asked sarcastically.

The native, he was a tall and powerfully muscled man, grinned.

"Would I hurt my hand if I killed a fly, master?" he countered.

Isaacs frowned.

"That will be another thing the fool will hold against me," he muttered. "He'll say I had his interpreter beaten. Had enough skoff, Dixon? Then let's go out and see this 'Voice' of the *umfundisi*."

The two men pushed back their chairs but before they could rise, John, the native teacher, came in.

He was in a state of abject terror. His face was ashy-gray, streaked with blood from his nose—testifying to the shrewdness of Tikkey's blow. He carried his cassock slung over his shoulder, his shoes were dangling about his neck and he was naked save for a loincloth.

"They always go back," Dixon commented thoughtfully, "when they're up against something they don't understand or are afraid of."

"Of course," Isaacs agreed. "He's been a savage a thousand years, he ain't been civilized more than five." Then to the native: "Vell, what is it?"

"Oh, sir," the native began breathlessly. "Very bad things are happening. The good Mr. Miles he will, I am afraid, be killed. He is so brave, but he does very foolish things. He——"

"Speak your own tongue," Isaacs interrupted tersely, "and be brief."

"Yes, sir." He squatted on his haunches. "*Baba!* You know that today all the people of this district go to Misongwe to make the yearly sacrifice to Kabulu Kagora?"

"I had forgotten," Isaacs exclaimed in self-reproach. "But go on."

"This morning I rode with *umfundisi* to the kraals that are near to the mission. And lo! all the kraals were empty and the fires were out—not a red ember glowed anywhere. It is the custom—you know it?"

Isaacs inclined his head.

"I know it," he said. "Go on."

"The *umfundisi* wanted to know the reason of things, and so I told him much about *Mlungu* and Kabulu Kagora! Also I told him of the Fire which that dread woman, Quarra Quate, tends in her hut. Aye, I told him that the people believed the Fire to have been lighted by the Great Ones when Time first was and gave it into the charge of Quarra Quate, saying that much evil would come to the land should the Fire ever go out. And Quarra Quate has been faithful to her trust—you know it?"

"Aye, I know it. Well?"

"*Au-a!* It may be that I made fun of the sacred things. And I lied, believing that the *umfundisi* wished to hear lies. I told him that at the time of sacrifice most evil deeds were performed. I was a fool.

"*Tchat!* Truly I was a great fool. Little did I think that the *unfundisi* would act as he did. But I should have known; I should have known! He is as quick to action as a snare set for the smallest of all birds; he is as unreasoning as a snake which strikes at a leaf which the wind has caused to blow against him."

The native swayed woefully back and forth; a lugubrious expression on his face.

"What did he do?" Dixon asked sharply.

"He turned his horse about and shouting to me to follow him, galloped swiftly toward Misongwe. I called to him, telling him to wait—for I am no rider. He made his horse go slower and when I had caught up with him he said:

" 'I must stop this evil. I am going to put an end to devil-worship. If they want to light their fires tomorrow they will have to rub their sticks together—the fire of Quarra Quate will be out! Hurry!'

"And he beat his horse so that it went away from me and I was blinded by the dust from its heels. And then, when I saw what it was that the *umfundisi* was planning to do I became greatly afraid and turning my horse came to this place. At the foot of the hill I fell from the horse—I have said that I am no rider—and he galloped away. So I came on, running as swiftly as I could."

"How long since you left the *umfundisi?*" Isaacs questioned.

The native hesitated a moment, his lips pursed thoughtfully.

"It was near to Mbane's kraal I left him," he said. "Two hours ago, I should judge."

The two white men looked at each other in consternation.

"He's almost there by now, unless he gets lost," Isaacs said.

"Yes. And they'll cut the —— fool into a million pieces."

Isaacs went to the door of the hut and shouted a rapid succession of orders. Returning, he dismissed the native, John, and: "I'm going to ride your horse, Dixon," he said. "He's fast an' he's got a good vind."

"Where are you going?"

"To Misongwe," Isaacs answered briefly.

"But you can't do anything," Dixon said helplessly. "Let the fool stew in his grease. You'll be well rid of him. The——"

Isaacs made an abrupt, silencing gesture.

"I don't care a —— for him—I'm thinking of the people. Think, Dixon: Vot 'ud your religion be without the Bible; or mine without the Talmud, or the Mohammedan without the Koran?"

"There wouldn't be any Christians, or Jews or Mohammedans."

Isaacs nodded sagely.

"Sure. An' the Fire in Quarra Quate's hut means as much as them three—an' it's a —— sight older."

"You'd better let me go, Big 'Un," the policeman roused himself. "It's my sort of job."

"No. I know these people—they know me. And I know the country as I know my hand. I von't have to follow the trail; I can cut across corners. Maybe, sure, he'll have to go slow an' then I can catch up vith him. An', anyvay, you are still sick; you could not ride fast. But, listen: This you can do. You follow me. You ride my horse—he is sure-footed an' can see like a cat in the dark—and bring my boys vith you; there's mules for them all to ride on. Maybe you'll get there in time to help, maybe it'll be all over. But you'll be doin' something, an' that's vot you vant, ain't it? You von't be sitting here doing nothing."

"All right," Dixon said slowly. "I'll do that."

Isaacs beamed.

"Good. I knew you'd do it. I've already told the boys vot they're to do."

Outside the hut a native shouted.

"All ready, master."

The two white men went outside. At the door stood a boy holding Dixon's horse; it had Isaacs' saddle and bridle on. Another stood near by, a short, heavy overcoat over his arm, a large hurricane lantern in his hand. Just within the circle of light thrown by the lantern—beyond it was total darkness—Isaacs' boys were lined up, mounted on mules. There were twelve of them and one held a horse ready for Dixon.

"Give us a leg up, Dixon," Isaacs said, and when he was in the saddle, "You take the overcoat—it is for you—you'll need it; the night will be very cold."

He took the lantern. The route he meant to take was a dangerous one. There would be steep gullies to descend and ascend; a swollen river to cross, and if he missed the ford——

He knew of a narrow path which crossed a bottomless bog. It was snake-infested—and Isaacs had a white man's horror of snakes—and a foot too much to the right or the left would mean a horrible death. But that path cut off a matter of five miles.

"They," Isaacs waved to the natives, "vill do just vot you tell them. They have been ordered."

He extinguished the lantern.

"Got to save oil. Goodby."

He spurred away.

"Wait!" Dixon shouted. "Take my rifle."

"Don't vant it," Isaacs' voice came back faintly, he was riding fast. "I ain't going to kill."

PAUL MILES shivered. The heavy night dew had soaked his clothing and its raw dampness seemed to penetrate to his marrow. He thought rather regretfully of his comfortable mission quarters and was a prey to half-doubts as to the wisdom of the course he had so impulsively planned to follow.

Never had he felt so lonely as now and he longed for the companionship of some one—even the parrot-like, inconsequential chatter of the native teacher, John, would be a relief from this terrible isolation; never before had he felt so small, so much of an alien intruder.

For once his complacent self-esteem, his confidence in the righteousness of his mission, his belief in the slogan he had adopted—the end justifies the means—was shaken. It occurred to him that the civilization which bred him was very young and Africa so old. With this thought he became self-conscious, vaguely realizing that the thing he planned was a colossal impertinence.

He had not come suddenly to this frame of mind.

From the time he had left John at Mbane until his arrival at this hiding place—among a jumble of rocks on a small hillock which commanded a view of the kraal of Misongwe—he had been driven by his stern determination. He had ridden like a madman, sparing neither the horse nor himself. Nothing had stopped him; nothing could have stopped him.

As he rode, he had dramatized the thing he was going to do. He saw himself as an avenging angel, stamping out the fire of ungodliness; somehow that fire had come to symbolize for him all the evil of Africa. He half-hoped that death would be his portion—that he would be spoken of as a martyr.

He had passed many natives on the way, but was unconscious of their hostile stares; did not understand the warnings and threats they shouted at him.

Once four warriors essayed to block his path. He did not check his pace but spurred his horse to greater speed and rode straight at them. They leaped aside to avoid being run down and only when he was beyond spear-throw did they look sheepishly at each other, remembering the assegais they carried.

He missed the ford of the river, which flowed close to Misongwe, by half a mile or more. But that had not deterred him. He forced his horse into the yellow, turbulent flood, swimming along by its side. The passage was nearly made when the horse was carried down stream to where crocodiles waited and Miles only just managed to make the shore in safety.

Had he known that many armed warriors waited for him at the ford—the signal drums had given notice of his coming—he would undoubtedly have attributed his stupidity in missing the trail leading to the ford to divine guidance and would have been even more inspired, more zealous, more of a fanatic.

But not knowing, he stumbled on, a little awed by his narrow escape, the scream of the horse as it was attacked by the crocodiles still ringing in his ears; he sincerely mourned the loss of the horse; it had been a good friend.

His progress, after he left the river, was slow—his clothes were dry before he had gone two hundred yards. He avoided the trails—and there were many of them; all converging on Misongwe—along which passed an endless procession of natives.

But for all that he crept stealthily through the bush, taking advantage of every bit of cover, crawling on his belly over open spaces, it was only because the natives were concerned with greater things than the possible presence of an interloper that he escaped discovery. And when none seek, it is easy to hide.

It was sundown when he came to the place where he now was and saw that the kraal was seething with a horde of natives: They were milling about the hut of Quarra Quate. He was sure of that; he had made John describe it to him very carefully. It was much larger than the other huts of Misongwe and set apart from the rest of the kraal—nearer to his hiding place.

Realizing that to appear now meant the failure of his mission, and death—the twinkling of spear heads about the hut of Quarra Quate told him that!—he resolved to wait until the setting of the sun and the coming of darkness.

Consumed with impatience he watched and waited; happy in the knowledge that no one suspected his presence. Neither could any one see him unless they were deliberately looking for him—and knew where to look.

The sun disappeared behind a far distant range of hills and for a little time the western sky glowed a deep red—and then total darkness.

A great, brooding silence followed.

Then the drums began to beat a solemn tempo—tum-tum-tum-*tum*— tum-tum-tum-*tum*——

Time passed.

Life seemed to have ceased—as if the earth were a hollow sphere on which the fingers of a mighty hand were beating a funeral dirge. The monotony of it was terrifying. Miles felt that the action of his heart was regulated by the beats—that, should they stop, his heart would cease to function.

The drummers increased the tempo.

The blood coursed rapidly through the missionary's veins and his pulses raced; his head seemed strangely light, his stomach inflated: For a little while he experienced the strange delusion that his body was the drum on which the giant fingers were playing—from within him.

The drumming suddenly ceased and Miles was horribly nauseated.

When the drumming started again it was accompanied by the loud chanting of a thousand voices, but Miles was not affected by it. He had gained control of himself and attributed his previous reactions to a digestive disorder.

He listened now with interest, wishing that he understood the meaning of it all, marveling at the great volume of sound.

"Every soul in the district must be here," he thought, and doubts began to rise in his mind; doubts, fears and a consciousness that he was alone.

He shivered violently.

Presently he rose to his feet and stretched his cramped limbs, rubbing the muscles of his calves and thighs, flexing his arms.

"It is time for me to act," he muttered. "I ought to be able to get into the hut unseen—unseen, at least, until it is too late to stop me."

He walked away from his hiding place, feeling his way carefully so as not to dislodge a rock which might betray his presence.

He had only gone a matter of fifteen paces when he stopped, greatly confused. Unconsciously he had walked away from the kraal.

He berated himself, called himself a weak-kneed, moral coward; assured himself that he ought to carry out his original plan; that the future of Christianity in the district—in all of South Africa—depended on its successful outcome.

For a fleeting moment he thought of the church at home and of the dim light which burned always before the altar.

Then he shook his head, turned and went resolutely down the hill toward the hut of Quarra Quate.

And with each step his doubts became feebler, his determination stronger.

PRESENTLY a vague shape loomed up out of the darkness and, with a sigh of relief, he knew that it was the hut of Quarra Quate. He went very slowly, now, his hands outstretched before him, barely raising his feet from the ground, sliding them along cautiously, testing the ground before he put his weight upon it.

His hands touched the wall of the hut and he rested a little while, seeking to gain control of his breath, gathering courage for the thing he was about to do.

A tiny beam of light escaped from a small opening in the wall.

He edged his way around and applied an eye to it.

The hut was brightly illuminated by a fire near which an old, old woman sat, rocking back and forth to the chant the people were singing and the beat of the drums. She was naked; her bones seemed to be devoid of all flesh, she was so thin; her skin was the color of gray ash. Occasionally she replenished the fire with sticks from the pile close to her right hand—she made of this simple act a solemn, religious rite.

Occasionally she took water with a wooden dipper from a large calabash and drank slowly, swallowing noisily. Miles smiled grimly and found himself wondering how she could hold so much liquid.

He had seen enough. He crept around still farther, until he could see the beam of light which poured out of the open door of the hut. But it was a flickering, unsteady light and it was not strong enough to reach the first row of natives who sat facing the hut. Miles sensed their presence—he could not see them, but he knew that they would all see him as soon as he stepped into that path of light.

He was glad that the people sat so far from the hut; that made it possible for him to enter before any one could interfere, and he hoped that the suddenness of his move would catch them totally off-guard—so that he could have a few minutes, at least, alone in the hut unhampered. He did not think it necessary to take the woman into his calculations. She would give the alarm, of course, but it would be too late.

He edged closer and closer to the beam. His helmet protruding into it casting a grotesque shadow. He pulled back his head, quickly, and gasped with relief that no one had seen. Perhaps, after all, he would be able to enter the hut unobserved.

He drew a deep breath and sidled into the hut.

The drumming and the chanting stopped and a loud cry of rage—terrifying in its unanimity—went up from the people. But they did not move.

Miles did not hear them; had forgotten their presence.

The woman shrieked and leaping to her feet rushed at him with cat-like agility, clawing and kicking at him.

He threw her roughly away from him—his eyes gleamed strangely in the firelight—and picking up the calabash, straining under the weight of water it contained, he emptied it on the fire with a loud shout of triumph.

There was a loud hissing; flames shot up, then dwindled, flickered and went out. The hut was filled with evil smelling steam and acrid, blinding smoke.

The woman stumbled to the door of the hut and in broken tones told of the evil. Only those in the front ranks heard her, but they quickly passed the story on to those behind them—a low menacing roar, continually increasing in volume, told of the story's progress.

The missionary stood stupidly by the ruins of the fire, coughing, retching, tears streaming from his smoked eyes. The instinct of self-preservation urged him to run and hide before the people recovered from the stunning blow he had dealt them, yet he did not move.

Presently he knelt down and, shading his eyes with his hand, endeavored to peer through the smoke and the darkness, raking aside the wet sticks with his hands. He found one which still glowed red at the end and picking it up he carried it to another part of the hut, where the floor was dry.

"Look!" he cried. "It is not all out. It—" Then stopped, realizing his helplessness. He knew even less about the language than he did about the people's customs.

He knelt down again and taking a small book from his coat pocket tore some leaves from it and placed them over the red glow. But they only smoldered. He blew gently . . .

Men entered the hut, talking angrily.

He rose to his feet.

"I am here," he said and, though they did not understand him, his voice guided them to him.

Strong hands reached out of the blackness and held him firmly. Then one of them struck him on the head with a knobkerry and he fell with a thud.

They kicked him aside and for a time forgot him, concentrating all their endeavors in helping the woman, Quarra Quate, to rebuild the sacred fire.

And their efforts too seemed unavailing; they had no small kindling at hand; working in the darkness they continually got in each other's way. Yet, at any other time, in any other place, they could have built up a fire from a smaller spark than that which glowed on the stick rescued from the water-soaked mess by the missionary. But this was a sacred fire; ordinary methods would not apply here—even if they had dared to use them.

Outside the hut the people surged restlessly back and forth: Mingling with the cries of rage were the sounds of weeping and lamentation.

Now and again fragments of sentences detached themselves from the roar, facets of light in the darkness of gloom.

"*Wo-we!* We are undone. Our huts will be cold——"

"All earth—be cold——"

"No fire——"

"Bring out—*umfundisi*—that——"

"Death——"

"Kill the *umfundisi*. He——"

"He spat in the face of Kabulu Kagora——"

"Kill him!"

"Kill! Kill! Kill! *Kill!*"

They all took up the word of death and shouted it with savage emphasis, repeating it again and again. The drumming started and the people timed their cries to the beats.

Tum-tum-tum-*tum*—Tum-tum-tum-*tum*——

"*Kill!*"

The men in the hut, silently and with

groping hands, located the missionary and dragged him outside of the hut, intending to make a sacrifice of him in the hope of appeasing Kabulu Kagora, the great god, and his servant Quarra Quate who was bending over a faint red glow and moaning piteously.

Once outside the hut the men straightened, allowing the missionary to slump to the ground, and breathed deeply, expelling the foul air of the hut from their lungs.

"Look!" one of them cried in a voice of fear. "Kabulu Kagora comes to punish us. As it was prophesied, so it is. From the east he comes."

The shouting and the drumming ceased, a moment's silence and then a loud scuffling as the people turned slowly to the east.

"*Au-a!*" they cried, and it was the cry of a nation mourning.

They saw a dim white light coming swiftly toward them from the east: It moved up and down, swayed to the right and to the left, occasionally disappearing, like the mast light of a ship in a heavy sea.

Some of the people started to sing the hymn of praise to Kabulu Kagora but their voices quavered and presently died away—this was something too big for them to grasp; it was a violent upsetting of well-established custom: They had always believed the prophesies would be fulfilled—but not in their time—assuredly not in their day.

Yet——

They waited. The silence was broken only by the sharp, hissing intake of air, the fretful wailing of babies and once a woman cried out hysterically.

The light came nearer; they could hear a rapid beating *tot-a-tot*, *tot-a-tot* and believed it to be the drumming of spirits until a child cried out—

"He rides a horse! He rides a horse!"

AND then the wrath of the people burst forth again, the cries of "Kill! Kill!" broke the silence, for they could see now that the light was only a lantern carried in the hand of a man on horseback—that that man was only Joseph Isaacs.

"He has come to mock us," one cried.

At that moment they forgot all that the storekeeper had done for them in the past; they remembered only the crime of Miles and their rage at him was too great to be appeased by his death alone: Their hate now embraced all white men.

Isaacs slowed down to a walk; he was near the outer fringe of natives.

"Is it out?" he cried.

"A spark burns," one of the men at the hut door shouted back. "Maybe your blood and that of the *umfundisi* will build it up again."

"If it is needed it is yours to take," Isaacs answered. "Now I am coming to you before it is too late."

And holding his lantern high above his head he spurred his horse into the milling crowd.

Hands stretched up toward him menacingly, women clawed at his legs, here and there an assegai head reflected the lantern's rays.

Isaacs smiled sadly down on the people.

"My life is yours," he repeated. "But do not take it save in the way ordained."

They pressed about his horse, mouthing inarticulate threats.

His progress became slower.

He had almost won through to the hut of Quarra Quate when they pulled him from his horse and buffeted him about. But he retained his hold on the lantern, holding it high above his head.

A knobkerry crashed down on his shoulder and he almost crumpled up under the force of the blow. An assegai pierced his thigh, blood streamed down his face from the wounds made by the finger-nails of frenzied women.

"Let me through, fools!" he bellowed, and his deep booming voice was heard by all there. "Let me through before it is too late. I carry the light of Kabulu Kagora. Are you all blind?"

He held the lantern high, then lowered it so that they could all see his face and they backed away from him, a little awed by the fierce light in his eyes.

"Should I have come here, fools," he continued, "alone, if my purpose had been evil? Need I have suffered this, and this and this?"

He pointed to his bleeding face, to his left arm which hung helplessly at his side—numbed by the blow; he pulled the assegai from his thigh, grimacing at the pain.

They cleared a way for him and he hobbled slowly forward, the horse gently muzzling his back.

As he passed Miles that man stirred and, with an effort, sat up. Isaacs looked at him contemptuously and passed on. Entering the hut he gave a great cry, compassion intermingling with anger, and kneeling down beside Quarra Quate spoke softly to her.

She looked up at him and then indicated the stick—its glow was very faint now—in mute despair.

Isaacs rose and collected a handful of dry sticks from the pile and poured kerosene—the woman thought it was water—from his lantern on them, and arranged them close to Quarra Quate! Under them he thrust some scraps of paper which he found on the floor of the hut. Then, taking some matches from his pocket he gave one to Quarra Quate and told her how to light it on the red glow of the stick.

She obeyed him but when the flame flared up she dropped the match from her nerveless fingers. It spluttered and went out.

The men in the doorway gasped.

Another match, another—many more—followed the first until, finally, Isaacs' patient coaching was rewarded and Quarra Quate held a lighted match to the paper. A flame flared up and licked hungrily at the kerosene-soaked sticks; they caught fire and the hut was filled with their blaze; their merry crackling put to flight the atmosphere of terrible gloom.

Isaacs sighed with relief. He had succeeded. The sacred fire had not gone out—would not go out. Its continuity was not interrupted. From the old fire Quarra Quate had built a new fire—with her own hands she had built it as custom ordains—and the fire which had been lighted when Time first was, would burn until Time ceased to be.

"We live," shouted the men in the doorway.

"We live," cried the people and the singing and drumming started again—the missionary and Isaacs totally forgotten.

Quarra Quate looked up into the face of the white man, in her eyes an expression of deep gratitude.

"*Baba!*" she said brokenly, then bent over her fire, swaying happily back and forth.

Isaacs stumbled to his feet, lantern in hand, and made for the door.

His foot kicked against something, looking down he saw that it was a book. Mechanically he stooped, picked it up and put it in his pocket. Then he left the hut.

He found the missionary humbly holding his horse.

"Mount!" he ordered curtly.

Silently the missionary obeyed and Isaacs clambered painfully up behind him.

They rode slowly away.

WHEN they topped a steep rise of ground above the ford Isaacs drew rein.

"We'll wait here until Dixon and my natives come," he said harshly. "They'll be along soon." It was the first time he had spoken since they had left Misongwe.

He dismounted, swayed weakly, then slumped to the ground.

The missionary quickly dismounted and bent over him, greatly concerned.

"There's nothing you can do," Isaacs growled. "You've done enough."

"I know it," Miles said meekly. "I've been a fool."

Isaacs fumbled in his pocket and took out the book he had picked up in the hut. It was a Bible.

"This is yours, ain't it?" he asked.

Miles took it and nervously riffled the pages.

"Yes," he said. "I tried to light the fire with it."

"Vot!" Isaacs shouted excitedly, raising himself on one elbow. "You vot?"

Miles passed his hand wearily over his eyes.

"Yes," he said in a low, sorrowful voice. "As soon as I had put the fire out I was greatly ashamed and filled with a consciousness of wrong-doing. So I tried to rectify the evil—but I failed."

Isaacs chuckled.

"But I didn't."

"No. I'm glad of that. I have a lot to learn, Mr. Isaacs."

"You'll learn—sure you will. Tie up my leg, will you?"

Swiftly, expertly, Miles bound up the wound in Isaacs' thigh, first washing the wound with water he fetched from the river in his helmet.

Presently, utterly exhausted, the storekeeper fell asleep. Miles took off his coat and, putting it over the sleeping man, sat down to wait the coming of Dixon.

Time passed. The drumming sounded faintly.

Suddenly Miles was conscious of a flickering of lights about the kraal at Misongwe.

As he watched the lights increased until they seemed to melt into one gigantic flame.

A little later and the flame broke up again into its component parts.

The drumming ceased; the people were going home to their kraals, carrying brands lighted from the sacred fire of Quarra Quate and all along the pathways leading from Misongwe to the kraals of the district, tiny flames of light advanced.

"How blind I've been," Miles muttered, greatly affected by the spectacle. "It is the same symbolism, and I did not realize it."

He closed his eyes and fancied he could hear the low music of an organ, could smell the fragrant smoke of incense, could see a tiny flame leaping from candle to candle.

He felt very tired.

When he opened his eyes again he saw that Isaacs was awake and looking at him through half-closed eyes.

Impulsively he held out his hand and felt immeasurably happy when Isaacs took it.

"You're such a foony fellow," the storekeeper chuckled softly and, closing his eyes, slept again.

When Dixon found them half an hour later they were both asleep, their hands still clasped.

NERVE

by H. R. Westerman

IT WAS related by a scout named Sage, that on one occasion in Kansas in 1848, being out with his friend Grin in search for a fertile stampede on which to recruit their horses, they had wandered some miles out of sight of the caravan, when, upon descending the ridge of a mound into the hollow beyond, they were confronted by a party of Pawnees. Without pausing to reflect, the traders turned their horses' heads, and galloped back the way they had come. The redskins gave rapid chase, and their arrows began to whistle on the still air.

"There are five hundred of the ——," exclaimed Grin to his companion.

"There are not forty," said Sage.

"Twenty dollars on it there are forty," was rejoined.

"Twenty dollars then is the figure," said Sage.

And not slacking their speed for an instant, the hands of the doughty disputants were grasped in confirmation of the bet.

"And now, how are we to know who wins?" was the query.

"I'll count them," said Grin, and thereupon the veteran of the woods wheeled full into the faces of the assailants and, extending the forefinger of the left hand while his right grasped a revolver, deliberately began counting—

"One—two—three—four——"

Amazed at this turn of affairs and not knowing what to make of it, the foremost Pawnee drew in his pony. Almost within scalping distance, the others came to a halt. Then seized with dismay at the assurance which enabled a lone man upon the prairie to breast the full tide of their charge and not being able to surmise what invisible danger was about to burst upon them, their hearts failed them, and, hurry-scurry, they bolted off at every point.

"Eighteen—nineteen—twenty—twenty-one—twenty-two——"

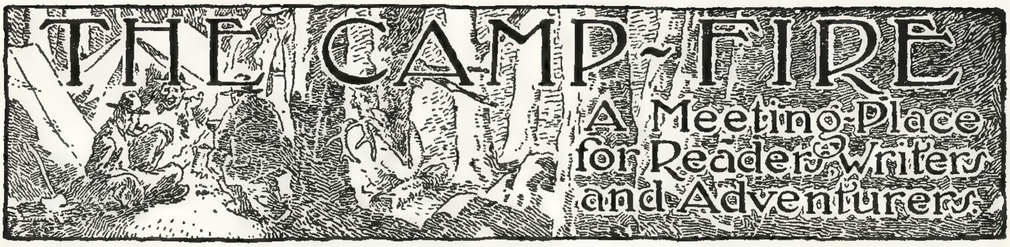
The lank finger of the trader slowly wagged in the direction of the receding forms as Sage, taking a curve, came around to his aid.

"Thirty-seven—thirty-eight—thirty-nine," he uttered with animation, as the last dusky figure dodged behind the crest of the mound.

Then turning, with a complacent smile, he said:

"There must have been forty. Who wins?"

"Make it a draw game, and I'll stand treat," answered Sage, and the chums amicably continued together their quest for water and grass.


THE CAMP-FIRE
A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

HOW much of our boasted civilization with its "modern" inventions do we owe to the Chinese? This comrade shows us very much in their debt.

Williams, Iowa.

I have been a silent but interested reader of both the magazine and Camp-Fire for years, but have never butted into the discussion before, but now that there is a temporary lull in the conversation I will speak up just to keep the talk going.

HAPPENING to look through some old *Adventures* the other day I noticed a letter in Camp-Fire by Harold Lamb in the issue of July 30, '23, in regard to the Chinese and the Mongols. The history of the Chinese is certainly interesting. At what period they first settled the country that they now occupy is not known with any certainty, but their traditions give them an antiquity of more than a 100,000 years prior to their half-authentic history which goes back fifty-five centuries or more. So the Chinese were living in the valleys of the Hwang-ho and Yang-tze-kiang Rivers long before the last extension of the polar caps.

At first they probably lived in caves along the river banks, spreading gradually along the banks of the tributaries and thus the people of the two rivers would have met and blended into one nation. Living on the rivers, the Chinese would have learned the art of navigation early, and large sailing canoes in all probability were cruising up and down the rivers and coasts of China and making voyages to Korea, and perhaps Japan, as early as fifty or sixty thousand years ago. At that time many animals that are now extinct were living. Chinese history, though it dates back upward of 5,500 years, is not much to be depended upon till some ten centuries later, for like all ancient peoples, their early history is of course purely mythical.

Among the many discoveries and inventions of the Chinese, might be mentioned, the discovery of the seasons of the year, during the reign of the Emperor (or *Hoang*, as the Chinese called their ruler), Fuh-hi, who it is said also taught his people how to raise cattle, and writing and introduced marriage among them. Fuh-hi reigned about 4800 years ago. He was succeeded by Shin-nung during whose reign medicine was first made and agricultural tools were improved. Before 2357 B.C. water-clocks, improved weapons, wheeled-vehicles, musical instruments, and junks had been invented, and polygamy and schools had been established. The Emperor Yau built roads and canals. The compass was invented in 1115 B.C. and engraving in 1000 B.C. And, as Mr. Lamb says, gunpowder, firepots, firecrackers, which they used extensively at celebrations, etc., and also in battle to frighten horses, etc., and repeating-crossbows and printing, etc.

AS IS well known the great wall of China is the greatest defensive work ever erected by man. It is probably that if the wall was lit up by powerful searchlights from one end to the other, the lights would be visible to the inhabitants of Mars, presuming of course that there are intelligent beings on that planet. As Mr. Lamb says, the Chinese did not invent guns or cannon of any kind, cannon were invented by the Arabs in the twelfth century, though a doubtful authority claims they were used at the siege of Belgrade in 1073 of the present era. The Mohammedans, however, used cannon in India in 1200 and Jenghis Khan had artillery at the siege of Tsaichew, China, and it is also said that he had cannon at the storming of Yenking, now Peking, China, in 1215, but this is doubtful. Though the Chinese did not invent either guns or cannon of any kind, they nevertheless were the first people to propel missiles with gunpowder, for during the reign of the Emperor Fai-tsu, in 969 of the present era, the Chinese attached rockets to their arrows, both to make them go farther and for incendiary purposes, so the idea of artillery, as well as the invention of gunpowder, is justly due to them. The Arabs learned how to make gunpowder from the Chinese and first used it in Europe at the siege of Cordova in 1280. The Spaniards learned how to make it from them, and in this way it became known to Europeans.

The city of Ghent had stone-throwing guns in 1313 and the English used them at Crecy in 1346. The story of the invention of gunpowder by the monk Schwarz is a pure fiction.

IN COMPARING the Khans, i.e. Jenghis and Kubli, with the Caesars, the Caesars are insignificant. Jenghis conquered a territory many times larger then the conquests of Julius, and Kubli Khan ruled over the greatest empire the world has ever seen. Yet the historians of Europe have scarcely anything to say of them. Malek Shah, reigned 1072-1093, the greatest prince of his age, whose empire reached from the borders of China to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the Caucasus Mts. to the Indian Ocean, and who is said to have traversed his great empire no less then twelve times during his reign, and also that life and property, were so safe and secure, in his empire, during his reign, that a child could have carried a bag of gold from one end of the empire to the other in perfect safety. Yet the historians of Europe, of the period have but a few words to say of this the greatest nation of their day. Of the childish quarrels, of the petty European nobles, however, they wrote whole volumes.—GEO. W. MYERS.

FROM Alanson Skinner something concerning his story in this issue:

Museum of the American Indian.

The details about Ioway customs, their dress, houses, war rites, etc., I learned from members of that interesting little Siouan tribe in 1914, and again in 1922-23. The more primitive part of the Ioway reside on the Cimmaron River, in central Oklahoma, between Guthrie and Cushing, near the little town of Perkins. Seventy to eighty of them in all, no more. A somewhat larger number, but more mixed as to blood, and more advanced in the white man's ways, are to be found on the Kansas-Nebraska line, on the old Great Nemaha Reserve. I have visited both bands and have obtained many beautiful specimens and much information from them.

The episode of the Sioux warriors and the private flute call is said to be true, only I am told that the Sioux actually took the girl's scalp as well, and escaped.

Some of the other episodes actually occurred to Moanahonga, "The Great Walker," when the Ioway tribe resided on the Des Moines.

There are frequent records of war-parties giving over their general hostile intentions and resting the fortunes of the day on a combat of champions before the lines. I am told this was particularly characteristic of the Cheyenne and Sioux.—ALANSON SKINNER.

HAS the quickness of the quick-drawing by the West's old-timers been exaggerated? Dr. Mullikin's answer to Mr. Reese's Camp-Fire statement was passed on to the latter to give him a chance to speak in rebuttal:

Mr. Reese remarks that the draw of the old-timers is all bunk and I just want to rise and remark that Mr. Reese has evidently never seen any of the real old-time gunmen in action.

I had a man with me in Texas and New Mexico—surveying for Sante Fé—that could show him a thing or two about drawing a gun, and a 7½ barrel at that.

I have seen him put his hands on his head, have another man throw up a can, draw, hit it with both right and left gun and return guns to scabbard before it had reached the top of the throw about 15 to 20 feet (or at least before it had stopped going up from the hits).

I saw him one day draw and shoot the *head from a rattler that was* in the *act* of *striking* at one of his mules.

In my estimation at that time he was a marvel with a six-gun and, though I have seen others, I never saw his equal. His name was Jack Mellish.

If Mr. Reese would just realize why he is an expert shot, he might possibly realize how and why gunmen of the "Wild Days" were such experts at the draw and shot, even with the old Frontier Colt. It was simply that they spent as much if not more time in practising the draw and shot as some of our eminent musicians spend practising their art.—LOUIS C. MULLIKIN.

P. S.: Probably Bill Hart, Tom Mix or Buck Jones might illustrate the draw for him or even Will Rogers. I think they could do it.

Mattoon, Illinois.

It is true, I never saw any of the old-time "gunmen" in action, but I saw a bartender pull an automatic and kill three men instantly and wound two others, one of them fatally. The five men were trying to hold him up. Two of the men killed had guns drawn on the bartender before he ever reached for his.

A BEGINNER in music usually practises an hour a day. If some of these old-timers practised an hour a day drawing and shooting a gun, he would soon be broke. The average cow-hand got about thirty dollars a month, and he didn't spend it all on shells either.

Billy the Kid, the outlaw whose life depended on his gun, didn't use a single-action, because the double-action, which Colt brought out about this time, was much faster.

Another case. Take Bat Masterson, who was sheriff at Dodge City, Kansas, in the early eighties and who died a few months ago from heart trouble, I believe, in New York City. Did he use a single action to bring in the bold bad-man? He did not. He used a shotgun, and it was not because he was a poor shot with a revolver. He once killed a man over two hundred yards away with a Colt single-action, but he used the sights.

There are many men buried in the West who were lightning quick on the draw but who missed their opponent because they didn't line up their sights, while the other man, perhaps a fraction of a second slower, lined his sights.

I believe Chauncey Thomas is the best authority in America on the single-action and he hasn't filed the sights off of his guns.

ANOTHER thing: the first single-action Colts were chambered correctly and would shoot where you held them, but after a couple of hundred were turned out (you remember it was built as an army gun) the cyclinder was deliberately over chambered so that the fired shells could be easily extracted, and a gun with an oversize chamber will not shoot where you align the sights.

I have seen new Colt single-action revolvers which absolutely would not shoot where the sights pointed, but if a piece of paper was wrapped around the shell so that it lined up with the bore, the gun would shoot like a rifle.

Perhaps Dr. Mulliken can explain how the old Westerners could do such marvelous shooting with a gun which did not shoot true.

Why will people persist in calling the Colt single-action revolver a "six gun"? There are six chambers in the cylinder, but the hammer is usually left down on an empty chamber. The accepted name for the single action in the Old West was the word "Colt." In Texas they were sometimes called a "stick" or a "cutter."—LELAND REESE.

P. S. As to hitting a can in the air, the trick is to shoot just as the can reaches the top of the throw. It is stationary for a fraction of a second before it begins its descent.

It might interest you to know that my grandfather's brother rode beside Buffalo Bill for years. His name was Nathaniel Reed.

VINEGARONES, niños and such. I made the same guess as Comrade Curtis' mud-pup or water-dog, but was wiped off the boards. To be honest, I've got sort of mixed up on some of these bug, snake and mysterious animal discussions until I'm rapidly nearing the stage where I couldn't tell a tarantula from a pterodactyl or a hoop-snake if I met one. Have already confessed I don't believe in any of those weird snakes except cow-milking snakes and I'm acting that way only so I can appear to know something about some of them, which I don't.

It was our Gila monster discussion that ruined me in the beginning. I've handled so many different letters of such diverse opinions as to whether its bite is poisonous that by this time I not only don't know whether a Gila monster is a fish or a wren but can't remember the main point as to whether its bite is fatal. We decided it all right, but I can't remember which way. I've even got so I don't like Gila monsters any more. It's all right if the rest of you want to, but me, I'm off them.

Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In your issue for July 10, Camp-Fire, I. F. Johnsen speaks of hearing in Mexico of an insect called the "niño" but not meeting one. I have an idea that his critter is the same as one familiar to New Mexicans as the "niño de la tierra," or "vinegaron," famed in story but rather rare in fact, though he does occur.

HE IS supposed to be fearfully deadly and very prevalent in some district where the narrator of his prowess is not. As to his poisonous qualities the writer can say nothing, as all the fatalities have happened to "a man that was a friend of a friend of mine." His appearance is hardly formidable, the only one the writer has seen being about an inch long, appearing uninvited at a dance, getting well to the middle of the floor before he was noticed, and causing a scattering of the crowd worthy the entrance of a small dinosaur. The writer was bending over to inspect him when a husky six-footer made a broad jump and landed square on the poor insect. And right then the appropriateness of the name of "vinegaron" appeared, for the odor of vinegar that arose was almost stifling and lasted for some time. There was no doubt of local sentiment as to the poisonous nature of the deceased, as the writer was seriously and severely censured for risking his life in the attempted inspection.

The creature described by B. S. F. sounds like what I have met in New York State under the name of "mud-pup," in a course in biology by a large scientific name, and in New Mexico as a "guajolote." In none of these places had I heard of him as poisonous, and hereabouts popular legend has it that he is good to keep in the well to purify the water!—F. S. CURTIS, JR.

A LAWYER comrade, while opposed to the anti-weapon laws, claims the argument they are unconstitutional is not valid.

Toledo, Ohio.

Being a reader of the "Camp-Fire," I am interested in the discussion about the anti-weapon laws. I think such laws are necessarily ineffective because the criminal will always obtain his weapons by illicit, underground means, while the honest man will be prevented from obtaining any instruments of defense. Furthermore, we are cluttering up our statute books with too many laws of this kind. Our legislatures have gone mad on the subject of law making. Few laws better enforced should be their aim. They should not only refrain from passing such laws as these anti-weapon laws but they should actually prune away many of the existing statutes.

BUT, as a lawyer, I think it well to call the attention of our Camp-Fire friends to the fallacy of one argument which they have used, namely, that anti-weapon laws are unconstitutional. They remind us that the Constitution of the United States, (and similarly, the constitutions of the various States) says that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. But they forget to quote the whole Second Amendment, which reads:

"A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

In other words, the purpose of the right is for the protection of the State by enabling its citizens to have the equipment of soldiers. The State has the authority to determine as to what that equipment shall consist. The Supreme Court of the United States, in the case of Presser v. Illinois, 116 U S. 264, said:

"We think it clear that the sections under consideration, which only forbid bodies of men to associate together as military organizations or to drill or parade with arms in cities and towns unless authorized by law, do not infringe the right of the people to keep and bear arms."

WITHOUT dragging in a number of authorities, for I have no desire at this time to write a legal treatise, I would say that the law probably is as follows:

The Constitution, as it stands interpreted by the Courts, gives no man the right to arm himself indiscriminately. Any law, therefore, prohibiting the individual from having weapons, solely as an individual, would not on this basis be unconstitutional.

Perhaps some readers will quarrel with this interpretation of the Courts and say that it does not give effect to the meaning of the Constitution. The answer is that under our theory of Government, the judicial interpretation of the Constitution is just as much an integral part of the Constitution as is any word, clause or paragraph in that document. If the Supreme Court says that the Constitution means a certain thing, legally speaking the Constitution does mean that thing, the opinion of the rest of the world to the contrary notwithstanding.

WE SHOULD remember that not all laws are free from error and that error does not necessarily vitiate a law. Many laws have been based on false premises and have been unfair in their operation. But if the proper legislative machinery has produced them, they are valid laws.

My only purpose in writing this letter is to correct the argument against the constitutionality of the Anti-Weapon laws. We have plenty of valid arguments against such laws without weakening our position by using invalid arguments.

I would be glad to exchange ideas with any one on this subject.—DANIEL J. MCKENNA.

Will some of our other lawyer comrades come forward? For one thing, when the Constitution was written, weren't all men able to bear arms, the "citizen soldiery," considered potential militia?

For another, why, if the Constitution makers meant "militia" in the limited sense used by Mr. McKenna, didn't they say "the militia shall have the right to keep and bear arms" instead of saying the people should have that right? If they meant "militia" in the limited sense, why should they use the word "keep?" That kind of militia doesn't keep its arms; the State keeps them, and while the State hardly needs express provision to keep arms, if Mr. McKenna is right the State is not given any such right.

Again, in those days good marksmanship was a prime essential in war. It seems only horse-sense that the Constitution makers knew this, knew that marksmanship not developed until emergency arose would be bad marksmanship. Knew, from bitter experience that militia in the limited sense were too few in number for national emergencies, and knew that the only possible way to ensure the "security of a free state" was to allow the people as a whole to keep and bear arms so that they might develop the marksmanship essential to warfare in those days?

Again, if the Constitution makers meant that only such of the people as happened to be in the militia should be allowed to keep and bear arms, why didn't they say so? They said "the people," they put no limit or restriction on the right they gave the people. They even took definite steps to prevent any one else limiting or restricting it, and wrote into the Constitution that this right "shall not be infringed."

I do not know the technicalities of law, nor how to twist and pervert laws from their original meaning and intent, but I know the English language as well as most lawyers know the law and better than most of them know the English language, I am fairly familiar with conditions when the Constitution was written and I leave it to any intelligent man whether horse-sense doesn't say the Constitution makers meant that all citizens should have the right to keep and bear arms without infringement.

As to the Supreme Court. I certainly am not of those who would abolish it. But consider this:

The Constitution provides that it can not be changed without the formal assent of three-fourths of the States. That means, today, 36 States. Yet the 9 men of the Supreme Court, if as Mr. McKenna puts it, can make their own interpretation as much an integral part of the Constitution as is anything actually written into that document. In other words, 5 men, all *appointed* by the holder of one office, can do what 35 states are not allowed to do. These 5 men can do this even if the 4 others of their court interpret in exactly the opposite way. It sounds like something from "Alice in Wonderland."

NO FURTHER developments in the Cunningham case.

A WORD from E. O. Foster in connection with his story in this issue:

> *Ah Poon* is a composite of a boy I had in China and an old Chinese gink who was kind of a pal of mine in Manila. He was with my regiment at Zapote Bridge and worked with me in different deals around the Islands after I was discharged. I helped him recover about a thousand dollars from the well in the old monastery described, but the insurgents, not the Americans, held it then. It was snappy work.—E. O. FOSTER.

IT BEGAN this way. Comrade Harriman was wearied of hearing the white man abused in favor of the Indian. Comrade Jones was wearied of hearing the Indian abused in favor of the white man. Both wrote letters to Camp-Fire and in presenting them I seem to have given the impression that one was the answer to the other. Each was an answer to the other, but each was written without knowledge of the other.

Then comrade Sinclair, judging Mr. Harriman's letter an answer to Mr. Jones', wrote to Mr. Harriman and they argued back and forth. It was not meant for publication but they let me see some of it and I asked for more and for permission to print. It turned out not to be an argument at all. Mr. Harriman was merely objecting to having white men painted as always in the wrong in dealing with Indians, not saying that Indians were all bad. Mr. Sinclair was merely doing the same thing, only the other way around. As the latter put it to Mr. Harriman: "You are right in your contentions, and I still hold the Indian is a patriot, and nearly always—not always, has got not altogether, but nearly altogether a raw deal."

I have permission to publish, but on the justifiable condition from Mr. Harriman that if any of it be printed a certain letter of his should be included. And now I can't find that particular letter. As you know, Camp-Fire's cache is the one thing in our office we can't systematize.

So I have to give up printing the correspondence. Anyhow, taken all together it would have filled quite a few pages.

But out of a letter from Mr. Sinclair to me I can take something whose main point was not part of the "argument."

> The United States Government, as a nation, leaving out all individual cases of good and bad men, both red and white, treated the Indian, as a nation with whom we contracted solemn treaties, just as binding and sacred according to national codes as those made with any foreign nation, in a shameful and disgraceful manner. We, a people whose forbears had civilizing influences for centuries, fought the red man after violating our treaties, killed men, women and children (Custer's attack on Black Kettle's camp on the Little Washita, Baker's so-called battle on the Marias River in Montana, Wounded Knee, the campaign against Chief Joseph and his Nez Perces and others) and after conquering them, expatriated them and scattered them all over the country. I told Mr. Harriman, that as far as I knew and my knowledge is limited to a little experience I have had in running around a few reservations and in reading history, that to this day, if the Indians have any land in the country that is worth a tinker's darn you will find some faction of white men using every political means to oust him.
>
> The Indian was barbarous, as could not otherwise be expected of a barbarian, but, doggone his hide, he was a patriot and fighting for the land of his fathers, the same as whites have been doing as far back as history goes.
>
> Our whole system has been that of conquest. The Canadian Government, and I am no Canuck, has at least in a measure made the Indian a half-way useful citizen, and self supporting, while we have until recently made a dirty, lousy, lazy bum out of him, and we have spent a good many millions and a good many lives in doing so. You hear the argument that the western progress of "civilization" made it a necessity for the red man to go! A good many crimes are committed wholesale under the blanket of "civilization." Progress!

AND two bits from a letter to Mr. Harriman:

> It has always seemed strange to me that the Canadian Government could send out a mounted policeman, alone, into a camp of hostile Indians, and that the trouble makers would be arrested and tried and punished—the other Indians permitted to go their way—while in the United States we took twenty-five years, several small armies, a heavy loss of lives, to accomplish what we have. Of course I am taking the, perhaps unfair, stand that the Canadian Indians were as troublesome at heart as those within our borders. The policy we adopted was wrong. I'll admit the Indian all that you say he is, but still, until recent years he got a pretty raw deal—in a great many instances.
>
> Your mention of the R. N. W. M. P. leads me to ask you if you have heard of the N. Y. State Constabulary. I come in contact with them quite frequently and if politics are kept free of them they

will come some time soon up to the standard of the Pennsylvania police and *near*, not up to, the Texas Rangers. These N. Y. troopers are nearly all mounted, although some use motorcycles. They are as fine a looking bunch of men as I have ever seen, all being around six feet or over, clean cut, typical American young men. They are dressed in gray uniforms, wear Stetson hats and are armed with single action and double action Colt 45's. They are bad medicine to monkey with and seem to have the faculty of turning up on darned short notice where ever any trouble is.

Suppose Germany had won the war and had taken all of France from the French and bundled them into reservations here, there and everywhere and treated them in other respects as we have treated the Indians. How the welkin would have rung with our scathing denunciations of the German greed and barbarity! Would we have blamed the French if they didn't accept it all thankfully and become models of propriety and excellence under the foreign civilization imposed on them? I'll say we wouldn't.

We wouldn't have stood for it even if the conquered people had been the Germans. Too brutal.

But we did it to the Indians.

And our childish defense is that they were uncivilized! If we ourselves were really civilized we'd have taken the stand that, being civilized, the manly, decent thing would be not to take advantage of them because of their helplessness before our superior material civilization. But we're not really civilized, except maybe materially. Just blissfully unconscious hypocrites more or less afflicted with swelled heads.

Now let some little bright-eyes rise up and call me a bad American.

"CAMP-FIRE" always welcomes a definite and authoritative covering of any of the subjects in our field. Here is such a covering of the Victoria Cross and its awards, from comrade F. P. Merritt, who has given a good deal of time to careful research along these lines:

You mentioned in "Camp-Fire," in the issue of Oct. 20, 1923, a history of the "Victoria Cross" which I sent you from London in 1913 and in a later issue Mr. R. J. Sutton's letter on the subject.

The remarks thereon indicate a wrong impression as to its award, status, etc., and in view of its prominence in the late war and close relation to our own congressional "Medal of Honor," I think "Camp-Fire" will be interested in the exact facts.

I obtained in June of this year at the War office in London, through the courtesy of Lt. Col. Rupert Stewart of the Military Secretary's staff, the full record on the "V. C." to June 20, 1924.

Five hundred and twenty-two Crosses were awarded from June 21, 1854 (the first award) to the opening of the Great War in 1914 for the following campaigns:

Crimea 111, Persia 3, Indian Mutiny 182, New Zealand 15, China 8, Umbeyla 2, Japan 3, Bhootan 2, Canada 1, Africa-West 1, Little Andaman Island 5, Abyssinia 2, Looshai 1, Ashantee 4, Perak 1, Quetta 1, Kaffir 1, Afghanistan 16, Zululand 23, Basutoland 6, Naga Hills 1, Boer Revolt 6, Egypt 3, Soudan 4, Nile Expedition 1, Burma 2, Manipur Rising 1, Hunza-Nagar 3, Africa-West 1, Burma 1, Chitral 1, Matabeleland 3, Punjab Frontier 11, Khartoum Expedition (Omdurman) 4, Khartoum Expedition (Gedarif Kassala) 1, Crete-Candia 1, Boer War 78, Ashantee 2, China 2, Somaliland 5, Nigeria 1, Nigeria 1903, 1, Thibet 1903-4, 1. Total 522.

Six hundred and thirty-one Crosses and two bars were awarded during the Great War for service in all theaters of operations. Four Crosses have since been awarded for acts of heroism in post-war operations. These totals, covering both the Army and Navy, make a total of 1,157 original Cross awards and two bars.

The American Congressional "Medal of Honor" and the "Victoria Cross," as awarded 1914-18 and 1917-18, are on a legal parity. The desperate character of the acts for which they were awarded is indicated by the fact that three men in each ten were killed in the actions for which the honors were granted.

THE act of Congress of July 9, 1918, covering the award of the United States Congressional "Medal of Honor" provides that "The President is authorized to present it in the name of Congress to officers, non-commissioned officers and privates of the Army, who while an officer or enlisted man in the Army, shall in action involving conflict with an enemy, distinguish himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity, at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty."

The Royal Warrants of the British War Office require as a qualification for the award of the Victoria Cross "conspicuous bravery or devotion to the country in the presence of the enemy" and this requirement is interpreted as meaning acts of signal devotion and desperate enterprise.

The evidence required by regulations of the United States Army and the British Army, in support of a recommendation for award, must be thoroughly authenticated by affidavits and personal testimony of eye witnesses, and the act of heroism must be distinctly above the call or demand of duty.

THE question is raised by Mr. Sutton as to Englishmen, Scotch, Welsh and Irish winning the "V. C." The law of the award makes any one eligible, of any nationality or birth, who is serving, enlisted or commissioned, in the British Army or Navy.

The regulations governing the award were promulgated by the British War Office under the direction of Queen Victoria in 1856, dating the award back to June 21, 1854, for service in the Crimea. In 1858 an amendment was published to include non-war heroism, under which one award was made for service in Canada to O'Hea, who extinguished a fire which was endangering a carload of ammunition. This medal is in possession of the American Numismatic Society at its museum, 156th Street & Broadway, New York City.

Three amendments in 1859 changed the regulations to include civilians under military orders under which some various awards have been made covering the service of English civilians in India during the uprising.

The amendment of 1867 included the Colonial troops. In 1881 regulations were published clarifying and restoring the original provision that the act should be before an enemy and adding Indian Ecclesiasticals to the eligible list.

Delivery was provided to nearest of kin in 1902. Theretofore the Crosses that were awarded posthumously were held in the War Office. In 1911 the Indian Army were made eligible. These soldiers in the service of the British Empire had previously been decorated by the Indian order of merit.

DETAILS of presentation and regulations concerning the wearing of medals and added bars, etc., were clarified and republished in 1916. The question arose in the House of Commons in 1898 as to the increase of pension and the pension matter has been left to the discretion of the Military Secretary's Committee since that date. It is now adjusted by council to fit the needs of the applicant and runs as high as 100 pounds per annum.

The original Army medals were suspended by red ribbon and the Naval medals by blue ribbon, now changed to a red ribbon to all branches of the service. The original Crosses were engraved in Roman type up to about 1900 and were made up to 1914 from cannon captured in the Crimea. The crosses awarded subsequent to 1914, which takes in all of the Great War awards, have been made from Chinese cannon. The contract for the making of these Crosses has been in the hands of Hancock & Co., of London, since its establishment. Since 1900 the engraving on the crosses has been pure square block letters. The makers place a secret mark on each cross in order to establish its genuineness. This was required by the British War Office on account of frequent counterfeits being offered for sale and their authenticity being questioned by collectors.

RECIPIENTS of the "V. C." wear upon the ribbon, when it alone is worn (on undress uniform) a miniature replica of the Cross in bronze, an additional replica being worn if a bar has been awarded. Miniature medals, small reproductions provided by the wearers themselves, are allowed to be worn in uniform, evening dress, and, on special occasions, in plain clothes evening dress.

It is a punishable offense for soldiers or sailors on the active list to sell or otherwise dispose of their medals or decorations, but men who lose them accidentally are usually allowed to purchase duplicates. It is laid down that British subjects shall wear the ribbons of their orders, decorations and medals in a certain sequence on their left breasts, the position of priority being in the center of the chest. The sequence begins with the "V. C." in precedence to all others. The actual medals themselves are worn only in full dress.

A LIST of the recipients still drawing annuity, and of such officers as are still living, is published quarterly in the Army and the Navy list. Should a recipient of the "V. C." at any time be convicted of crime or cowardice, the cross is forfeited and in the case of a non-commissioned officer or private the pension is withdrawn. The holder of a Cross is entitled to use after his name the designation of "V. C." which precedes all other appellations of similar nature. The names of the recipients as published in the Army or Navy List are preceded by the letters "V. C." in Roman style.

Two awards of extra bars have been made in the seventy years history of the "V. C."—Surgeon-Captain A. Martin-Leake, of the South African Constabulary, won his "V. C." on the 8th of February, 1902, in the South African campaign. He repeated as a Lieutenant of the Royal Army Medical Corps on the 29th of October to the 8th of November 1914, in Belgium. Captain Chavasse of the Royal Army Medical Corps won his cross in France on the 8th of October, 1916, and the bar in Belgium the 21st of June to the 8th of August, 1917.

I HAVE before me the entire list of awards made during the Great War, and I find that troops from every section of the British Empire are represented in the list. An American, as an American citizen, under the regulations, can not win the "V. C.", but an American citizen serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces is eligible, and there is no doubt in my mind but that there are some American citizens who had the "V. C.", although the official lists do not identify them as such. A page of the official list containing 42 names shows Crosses awarded for service in Belgium, France, Mesopotamia, in the Navy, Gallipoli, East Africa, Palestine, the Balkans, West Africa and the Cameroons won by troops from England, Australia, West Africa, Wales, Canada, Ireland and India.—F. P. MERRITT.

THIS 1922 letter from our cache takes us back to a discussion on the best way to break horses!

Sidney, Nebraska.

You radicals have captured my "nanny." First, let me tell you about the spade bit. This is an especially sore point with me. I was one man among many in Wyoming who used a spade bit and I was criticized pretty badly for it. Here is my style:

BREAK 'em with a snaffler, mouth 'em with a heavy Kentucky racking bit or a Logan and then put on your spade. One season makes a cowhorse instead of the usual two or three. But one thing must be thoroughly understood. A man must control himself when he uses a spade or else it is no good. The reason most fellows have no success with spades is lack of brains or no consideration for their horse. The usual idea is that for an iron-jawed horse they are the stuff. All wrong. Start him on a snaffle and get him out where he can't hurt himself and then make a stake horse out of him. Then use your racking bit and keep on working with him until you put on your spade.

For a light-mouthed horse (this is a hard horse to deal with) the spade is absolutely the best there is. Most of these horses fight a bit. With a spade-bit in their mouths, they hold their heads down where they can use them.

THEN, about square skirts. Fine! Anything that meets your requirements is absolutely the best you can get.

Personally while breaking a young goosey bronk one time, I roped a big wild steer and stepped off to let them go to it. For about ten minutes it was hard to tell which was on top the most. When the tangle straightened out, one side of my saddle was round skirted and the other was square. The rope caught on behind one skirt and tore it off. I use a round-skirted saddle now. Also think these new skeleton rigs with no skirts are the best. They do not blister a horse's back, but of course they are awfully homely.

Now for spurs. I have run renegade steers in Texas, wild horses in Nevada and the same in Wyoming and have seen all kinds of spurs used. I personally use a very heavy pair with about a half drop shank and 36-point rowel, although if I keep one string of horse, I change rowels accordingly.

Hope, I haven't bored any one but as I said, you captured my "nanny."—P. S. ERWIN.

FIFTEEN years ago if I'd read the following letter I'd have said "Oh, ——!" and gone on to the next. I'm older now. During those fifteen years I've watched men go on trying to solve their many problems with man-made laws. Most of these man-made laws are inspired by greed, fear or ignorance.

Our basic common law is the old English common law and the old English common law was built up primarily for protection of the rights of property. Human life, happiness and general welfare were strictly secondary considerations. They remain secondard considerations with us today. Oh yes they do! Not only in our failure to pass a national law prohibiting child labor and other similar failures, but through all the theory and practise of both common and statute law. The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence sounded a moral advance. Good intentions. But what is the Constitution if it stands in the way of property's greed? What is happening, for example, to our Constitutional rights of free speech and free assembly, the right to have and bear arms?

If you watch things carefully for fifteen years you have to admit that our laws are such, and so interpreted and applied, that property, not human rights and welfare (to say nothing of moral issues), controls both our international and our internal activities and conditions. You can, for example, kill an American citizen in a foreign country without much risk of more than a protest at most from Washington, but confiscate an oil-well or any other commercial concession and watch the warships come! You can sell our people food that ruins their health yet run little risk of even what light penalties the law prescribes, but steal a dollar from one of them and see what happens.

THE following letter suggests the application of moral laws. "What the —— have moral laws got to do with our practical affairs?" you say. Quite right. They have almost nothing to do with them as things are. But shouldn't they? Wouldn't they be better? "No," you say. But your no can't mean anything because you don't know what you're talking about. You're just theorizing and guessing. *They've never been tried.* We have moral laws but in general we keep them for Sundays and tight places; we don't let them mix into our "practical" business and affairs—they'd be too darned troublesome and idealistic. Two separate packages. We don't use the Sunday package on week-days.

There must be something wrong with our every-day laws and practises if they are so totally irreconcilable with our moral standards. And something wrong with our moral standards if we permit them to be barred from our everyday affairs.

MORALS have become a bit old-fashioned—except in the matter of passing laws against sins other people have and you don't—and religion is more or less considered the sign of inferior intelligence. Quite naturally so. The professional exponents of religion and morals have too often become fanatics arguing about details of creeds. Only the other day the papers carried a bitter argument between ministers as to whether the whale really swallowed Jonah. If you don't believe it did, said one creedist, you are an infidel. Poppycock! What have a whale's insides got to do with real religion? Creeds are not religion but merely attempts to interpret or translate religion. Such attempts are necessary, but to insist that another man accept whatever creed you pick out for yourself is merely bigotry, injustice, persecution and everlasting ignorance.

And while the preachers spend so much of their time and energies arguing and fighting over creeds most of us ordinary people get so disgusted over the excess of their arguing and the deficit in their real preaching and practise of real religion that we turn our backs and go our own ways.

BUT hair-splitting and intolerance are not religion. Underneath all these creeds is real religion. Suppose we were to dig down to *it* and apply *it* to everyday affairs. Wouldn't work? You're only theorizing and guessing. God knows we've never tried it.

The Golden Rule alone would, if really applied, rid us of our political and social ills. It wouldn't? You're theorizing and guessing again. How do you *know* it wouldn't? You don't. My own guess is that it would, and my guess is a whole lot better than yours. You haven't any practical evidence to bring forward, and I have. You'll get it at a later Camp-Fire.

Read the letter. There is going to be no general discussion on religion. The sole question is whether the essence of all religions appreciably represented in this country would not produce better laws than those Mammon has produced for us.

Kelso, Washington.

If *Adventure* were a newspaper I suppose I could sign myself "Old Subscriber," and anyway I'll preface this article by saying that I read my first copy of the magazine in April, 1912.

THE idea of this letter is to further in a small way, if I can, the work that *Adventure* is doing for better citizenship. Not that I lay claim to being a good citizen myself, if voting can be considered one of the requirements of good citizenship, for I'm past thirty and have never voted. In the first place, I've never been in one place long enough since I was twenty-one to become eligible to vote, but even though I were eligible I've always felt like a lot of other people—"what's the use?" But lately I am beginning to see things differently and it is due in part at least to some of the things said at Camp-Fire.

But though I have taken no active part in the affairs of our country (barring war service), I have done a good deal of thinking on the subject. One of the topics that doesn't receive much attention in "Camp-Fire" is religion. In the first place it is a hard topic to get started on and in the second place it is a hard topic to handle in a general way without hurting somebody's feelings. But nevertheless it is a subject that practically every man and woman has some thoughts about and I've noticed that when a little crowd is gathered together around a camp-fire or a club fire or in some other intimate surroundings sooner or later religion becomes a topic of conversation.

I AM not a preacher, and in fact I haven't been inside a church for two years or more. And I am not particularly interested in whether you are Jew or Gentile, Catholic or Protestant. But the one thing I am interested in is whether or not you believe in a Supreme Being, whom, for sake of brevity, we will call God. Because if you are materialist or an atheist there is no way in which I can appeal to you.

Any man who believes in God must necessarily believe that he—and all the rest of creation as we know it—is a production of that God. And if a man believes in God, he probably believes in some particular book as being the revelation of that God, whether the book be Bible, Old or New Testament, Talmud, Koran, or whatnot. And he probably believes that the purpose of that book is to give to man a comprehensive set of *laws* to govern his conduct while living on this earth.

I think I am safe in assuming that since *Adventure* is published in America and circulates chiefly among American born and English speaking people, the book we accept as the revelation of God is the Bible, Old and New Testaments. This being the case, it follows that the particular laws given to us by God are summarized in the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament and in the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament.

IF WE have laws given to us by a Supreme Being, than Whom no greater Mind is known or acknowledged, why do we not use *these* laws in the conduct of our government instead of making laws of our own? Frankly, do you think it is possible, or ever will be possible, for a human being to formulate a set of laws for the regulation of human affairs that will be satisfactory to all human beings to whom they may be intended to apply? *Human* laws that sooner or later some other human will not try to upset or destroy?

Oh, you say, but we *do* use these Divine laws. Do we? We say we do, we very often may think we do, but *do we?* And tell me this, if you really believe in God, do you think He would have been so simple minded or so unkind as to give us a set of laws which we could not use?

In this matter of righting the wrongs that beset our government, let us not forget that we have a Code of Laws that cannot be bettered by any man. Let us strive to avoid the mistake that has always been made in the past, that of overthrowing one set of fallible human laws and substituting another set of equally fallible human laws. Never mind about the "weakness of human nature." Either God knew what He was doing when He gave us those laws or else there is no God.

IN CLOSING I'd like to make one more suggestion. Men around this Camp-Fire older than myself will remember Edward Bellamy and the sensation that he created with his books on a new social and economic order. If you are sincerely interested in better citizenship I'd like to suggest that you get two books by Edward Bellamy and read them—"Looking Backward" and "Equality." Perhaps you will laugh at them and call them idealistic, but admit to yourself that the system he portrays would be pretty fine. Then, if you believe St. John when he says that "Now are we the sons of God," and if you believe the Master when he says "The things I do you shall do, and greater things," ask yourself if after all such a system might not be possible. Certainly not all at once, but isn't it an ideal worth keeping in mind while we are working for better citizenship?

Now, get me right, please. I am not advocating the overthrow of our Constitution and the establishment of a government based on the literal interpretation and application of the Bible, but I do maintain that any satisfactory system of government must have the foundation of its laws in Divine Law and that Divine Law must be the final arbiter, not just in theory, as at present, but in actual fact. What the citizenship of this country becomes depends absolutely on the faith we have in God and the degree to which we apply that faith.—LINDEN B. PENTZ.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow. Any one may apply for a Camp-Fire Station.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin board

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

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192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
227—Adrian. S. N. Cook, 221 Clinton St.
Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
145—St. Cloud. F. T. Tracy, 426 Eighth Ave. N.
Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Tunica Plumbing & Electric Shop.
99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.
268—Pascagoula. C. E. Walter, 239 Orange St.
Missouri—51—St. Louis. W. R. Hoyt, 7921 Van Buren St., phone Riverside 250.
94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.
Montana—240—Fort Missoula, Company C, 4th Infantry.
254—Hamilton. Mrs. Lucy Hyde, 64 N. Second St.
Nebraska—95—Omaha. L. W. Stewart, 119 No. 16th St.
214—Tecumseh. Dr. C. F. Roh.
New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.
203—Elephant Butte via Engle. Henry Stein.
229—Santa Fe. N. Howard Thorp, 103 Palace Ave.
New Jersey—164—Chatham. Roy S. Tinney.
91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, P. O. Box 254.
146—Paterson. Charles S. Gall, 378 Dakota St.
244—East Orange. Alfred C. Swenson, 77 Lawton St.
245—Corbin City. Lee Roberts.
260—Camden. Benj. P. Thomas, 2791 Constitution Rd.
269—Eugene Connett, 170 Turrel Ave., South Orange.
275—Camden. Captain George Herbert Sparrow, Ship No. 1269 Naval Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Armory of Second Battalion, Naval Militia of America, Temple Theater Building, 415 Market St.
New York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.

147—Youngsville. Harry Malowitz, Youngsville House.
165—Saratoga. Wm. Marshall, Office No. 9, Chamber of Commerce Arcade.
177—Brooklyn. George Iverson, 306 Macon St.
185—Brooklyn. J. M. Canavan, 69 Bond St.
193—Niagara Falls. Roy Tompkins, 1155 Garret Ave.
194—Hadley. Mrs Chas. H. Black.
205—Newburgh. Jacques Teller, 5 Golden St.
215—Yonkers. George's Sport Shop, 45 Main St.
226—Red Hook. P. W. E. Hart, The Silver Birch Shop, Albany Post Road, Dutchess Co.
233—Albany. R. N. Bradley, 84 Livingston Ave.
239—Valley Stream, Long Island. Arthur Borchmann, Centarlane.
North Carolina—133—Pine Bluff. N. Steve Hutchings.
159—Waynesville. Harry M. Hall, 720 Walnut St.
92—Biltmore. C. Marshall Gravatt, Felstone Co
255—Tryon. Howard Shannon.
North Dakota—206—Fairmount. Frank Kitchener, Richland Hotel.
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63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water St.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Buena Vista. Geo. T. Watters.
166—Toledo. Frank P. Carey, 3267 Maplewood Ave., or wherever his Ford happens to be.
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242—Bellefontaine. Harry E. Edselle, 328 Plumvalley St.
263—Toledo. F. P. Carey, Box 143, Station A.
264—Toledo. S. G. La Plante, 1820 Dunham St.
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Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.
Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
21—Braddock. Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach, 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P. & R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
78—Pittsburgh. Peter C. Szarmach, 3030 Brereton St.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
182—Greensburg. Don Frederick Wermuth.
224—Oil City. J. M. Blair, 608 W. Front St.
247—Pittsburgh. J. F. Lichtenhaler, 224 Swope St.
248—Philadelphia. Carl D. Charles, 214 East St., Wissahickon.
261—Shippensberg. *The Chronicle*, 12 South Earl St.
South Dakota—179—Fairburn. Jesse K. Fell, *Custer County Press.*
270—Centerville. C. H. Hornbeck. *The Centerville Journal.*
South Carolina—217—Charleston. J. H. Keener, 346 King St.
97—Charleston. J. W. Mette, Navy Yard.
Tennessee—105—Knoxville. C. G. Pruden, 2024 Rose Ave.
Texas—33—Houston. J. M. Shamblin, 4805 Oakland St.
123—San Juan. D. L. Carter, Box 436.
134—Breckenridge. Joe Randel, 226 Baylor Avenue.
148—Port Arthur. Ralph C. Cornwell, 215 Eighth St.
174—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West Eighth St.
183—South San Antonio. J. F. Nicodemus, Box 111, So. San Antonio Transfer.
218—Fort Worth. Robert Lentz, R No. 6 Box 73.
208—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West 8th St.
271—Harlingon. H. C. Jennings, Box 324.
280—Reese. L. H. Baker.
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Virginia—108—Cape Charles. Lynn Stevenson, P. O. Box 26.
219—Richmond. Wm. Meek, 104 S. 1st St.
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61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book-Store, 1330 First Ave.
154—Mt. Vernon. Miss Beatrice Bell, Western Washington Auto Club.
155—Olympia. B. F. Hume, Commercial Club Rooms.
172—Sunnyside. Mark Austin.
196—Arlington. F. T. Herzinger.
220—Sultan. George W. Snyder, Main St., opp. P. O.
281—Warm Beach. Paul E. Vollum and Kirkham Evans, Evans Bldg.
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45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 84 La Riviere St.
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62—Woodstock, Ontario. George L. Catton, 94 Metcalfe St.
85—Oshawa, Ontario. J. Worral, 6½ King St. E.
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272—Honolulu, Hawaii. Hubert T. Miller, Room 4, Silent Hotel.
Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.
70—La Ceiba. Jos Buckly Taylor.
India—197—Calcutta. W. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.
Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.
Navy—71—U. S. *Arizona*. Elmer E. McLean.
Newfoundland—132—St. John's. P. C. Mars, Smallwood Bldg.
Porto Rico—46—Ensenada. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.
Philippine Islands—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.
Virgin Islands—284—St. Thomas. Joseph Reynolds, The Grand Hotel.

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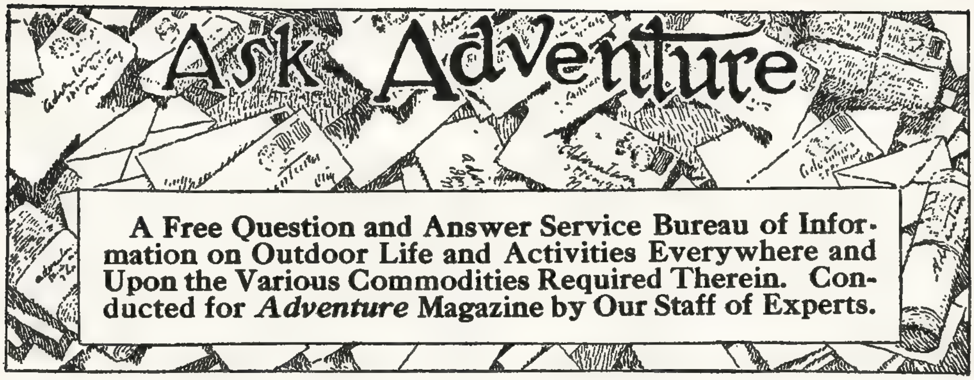
Ask Adventure



A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

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6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey
27. Asia Minor
28—30. Balkans. In Three Parts
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32. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
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Sheep in Idaho

WHY some folks shout for mutton:

Request:—"Would like to enter the sheep-raising business in a moderate way. What would be the minimum of capital necessary, the method of obtaining land for grazing, amount of sheep needed in order to start, and approximate cost of all the above? How often do sheep fold a year?

There are two of us, young, strong and healthy. We have roughed it before in the West, and are anxious to get back again.

Any further particulars which you might be able to give me, would be very greatly appreciated. What region would you recommend to start in?"—GEO. T. NEUMANN, New York.

Reply, by Mr. Newman:—If a person was undertaking to go into the sheep-raising business it would be necessary for him to have at least a band of sheep in order to operate economically. A band of sheep under present conditions would cost from twenty to twenty-five thousand dollars in cash. The investment in buildings and equipment would run from five to ten thousand dollars. It would cost roughly from thirty to thirty-five thousand dollars to get in the sheep business under present conditions in a moderate way. Under the Idaho law migratory stock, which means all stock using the public range, is assessed in each county in which it is kept for the proportion of the year in which it is in that county.

This public range is within the U. S. Forest Reserves and is leased to the cattle and sheep owners. Its use is strictly under the supervision of the forest rangers, and the lease money, which is no small item, is divided between the Federal Government and the county in which the range lies, the local share going to the road and school funds. The Federal Government share, aside from the cost of administration, is used in constructing roads and in other improvements in the Federal Forests.

The rules and regulations of the Government for the use of these ranges are too voluminous to be used here in this letter. They are based upon the idea of first chance for the use of the range to be given to the small farmer and stock grower whose farm lies within the reserve or adjacent to it. Leases run for five years, but the lessor acquires no permanent right to the grazing privileges although in case of sale of a herd of cattle or a band of sheep by a lessor to one who has no such right it is customary for the lease right to go with the cattle or sheep transferred. Thus it is impossible for those seeking new locations and wishing to engage in the growing of range cattle or sheep to purchase his animals and thus positively secure range privileges accompany the animals purchased.

Sheep are run in bands of from 1,200 to 2,000. They are bred for this country so as to lamb the first of May. Shearing begins about the tenth of June. The Western lambs make the finest mutton obtainable, and it is their sale on the Eastern markets in such vast numbers that in the past twenty years had overcome the old prejudice against the use of mutton because of its "sheep flavor." Such flavor does not exist in the mutton from these range lambs. It was the age of the sheep, not the method of handling the carcass, which gave the old-time mutton its disagreeable flavor and created a public prejudice in American homes against the use of mutton, for it was the custom of those old-time Eastern sheep men to hold their lambs and sell the old sheep for mutton. The growing of range lambs for the Eastern markets has overcome that prejudice and made mutton a favorite dish in every American home.

The Western sheep man keeps his breeding ewes for the service for six or seven years, marketing the lambs each Fall and Winter. When the old ewes are put on the market their flesh is sold to the foreign population of the Eastern cities, who demand the "wool" flavor in their mutton from their lifetime habit of eating only the old sheep of their flocks in the old country.

In closing I will say that beef cattle and range sheep business are still the leading industries of parts of Idaho. They have adapted themselves to the new conditions, and the sheep or cattle men wishing to follow that business will find here an abundant opportunity to invest in a profitable and well established line of business.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Trading in the Orinoco Country

WHERE hardwoods average to weigh six pounds to the board foot; *i.e.,* wood one foot square and one inch thick:

Request:—"In regard to Venezuela and the Guianas. Could a person take a fifty or seventy-five pound auxiliary schooner and use it on the rivers for trading purposes? If not what kind of an outfit should he have?

Do you have to have a Government permit to prospect in that country?

Would it be better to enter through Venezuela or Guiana, or go up the Amazon and take a branch river into the mining country?

Would you think it safe for a woman and two children to go along if the trip were made by boat?

What would be the best material to take for trading purposes?

I have never been anywhere around South America. Put in two years in the Army; Second Division, until June 1st, 1918; then to Italy as signal instructor. Just enough running around to make me want to see the rest of it.

And here's another question: Could a person buy various hardwoods if he went inland by water and haul them to the U. S. to an advantage; or would it be better to ship from there by steamer? Am enclosing addressed envelop."—MAURICE W. OYLER, Washtucna, Wash.

Reply, by Mr. Barbour:—An auxiliary schooner such as you mention could be used on the lower Orinoco; but I would not recommend it for trading purposes, for you would want to work farther upriver, where there are considerable current and frequent shallows. A shallow-draft, broad-beam gasoline launch would be better.

No Government permit is needed for prospecting.

It is a very hard trip up the Amazon, thence up the Rio Negro and through the narrow connecting stream to the headwaters of the Orinoco. And that region is not the mining region. At least the region that is now in the public eye is on the Mazaruni River in British Guiana, which is not accessible from the Amazon.

It would be fairly safe from a danger standpoint to take women and children with you, but not at all advisable because of the tropical climate, hardships, distance from doctors, etc. If you went in from Georgetown you could make arrangements to leave them there.

Trading material: Not the gimcracks that one often thinks of in that connection, but cotton cloth, machetes, hunting knives, tools, Ingersolls, etc.

In your last question do you mean to buy hardwoods and bring them home in your boat? There are plenty to be had; but, good Lord, man, they average about 6,000 pounds to the thousand board feet, so the amount you could bring in your boat wouldn't be worth fooling with.

The hardwoods of the Guianas so far have found no market in the U. S., though many of them have virtue. Venezuela has Spanish cedar and mahogany, but several big importers practically control the market. Qualities differ so much that an amateur buyer could not be sure he was securing what the trade wanted, in the matters of grain, figure, etc.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

The Outlaw, Watson

LEARN about him down Porpoise Point way:

Request:—"Will you give a steady reader of *Adventure* a few pointers concerning the south Florida coast, particularly the Ten Thousand Islands?

How near can I drive a car to get to some good place where I can build me a houseboat and at the same time store the car where it will not sink out of sight in the mud, etc.?

Could I 'squat' there on some of the islands and raise enough vegetables to supply my wants while I engaged in fishing, etc.?

Where can I obtain a topographical map of that section? I have heard a lot about the advantages of fishing there, particularly in Cabbage Bay, and what I want to do is drive there, buy or build a houseboat, and remain there the rest of my days should the place suit me, as I am tired of cold winters; have spent winters in Florida and other southern States but never succeeded in getting into the wilds as I wanted to; and if I can get some good dope on the above subject I am going to cut loose with a gun, fishing rod, cooking outfit, etc., and let the years take care of themselves.

I will be very grateful to you for *any* information regarding southern Florida that you can give me; another crazy idea I have is to start in near Waycross, Ga., and explore the big swamp south of it, as I always have been more or less of a bug on going into out-of-the-way places that no one else could see any sense in."—E. L. BENNETT, Flint, Mich.

Reply, by Mr. Liebe:—You can drive a car down to Fort Myers on the Caloosahatchee River near the Gulf and build a houseboat there; or if you can find the necessary material in Marco, some fifty or sixty miles south of Fort Myers, you can drive on from Fort Myers to Marco and build your boat there. Marco is on an island or key, but there is a ferry that will take you across the pass that separates said island or key from the mainland.

There are a dozen or so houses in Marco. Clamming and fishing are the industries the village depends upon. It is just north of Gallivan's Bay, and the Ten Thousand Islands begin in Gallivan's Bay.

Away down the coast, on Wood Key, on which is Porpoise Point, I have a friend named Eugene Hamilton; he is an odd character, and a very strong one, and it would be well for you to make friends with him shoould you get down that far. Mentioning my name will help a little perhaps. Incidentally I found Hamilton very much all right. If you do see him, ask him to tell you the story of the outlaw, Watson. I wrote it up for the magazines just as it happened, and the magazines wouldn't touch it because it seemed too far-fetched. It's thrilling, all right.

Not sure, but I think you could "squat" 'most anywhere down there, so long as somebody else hadn't already squatted on the place you picked out, and get by with it. I fancy all the people down there are squatters.

A map of that section? I don't believe there is a correct map of that section in existence. None of the maps I had were in any way whatever correct. It's the last frontier, a sort of back o' beyond.

You can't get into Cabbage Bay with any boat but a rowboat, because of the interlacing mangroves over the creek that takes you there from Upper Lostman's—lost man's is right!—River. But the creek is not more than a mile or so in length.

Find Eugene Hamilton and use him for a guide until you can find the way to Cabbage Bay, Lostman's Big Bay, etc., yourself. You can find all the wild stuff down there that you want. If it weren't for the darned mosquitoes I'd want to go there when I die instead of to heaven.

Hamilton told me I was one of the first white men to see Cabbage Bay in years and years. He is the only man I know of who can find it. Better take a lot of fishing tackle with you; those fish know how to tear it up, all right! Wooden minnows go finely there, and especially the floating Bassoreno, Pflueger's Surprise and Heddon's Zaragossa. Get the bigger size, and use strong lines.

I would prefer a cabin launch to a houseboat, by the way.

I feel weak when I try to tell about that wild country. It would take a book to tell it all. Why not write Hamilton, addressing him at Chokoloskee, Lee County, Fla.? He will come to Marco for you, I think, if you wanted him to.

For deer down there, I recommend a 30-30 rifle with soft-nosed bullets and a Lyman peep-sight. Take along some snake-bite medicine, too.

The best of luck to you. Wish I could go along!

Student Dueling in Germany

WASTING time in a good cause—for the favor of the fair:

Request:—"I am an American college student and have become interested in a certain phase of student life in Germany. Before going into details I would be grateful if you told me about how much a year's study would cost at, say, Bonn or Heidelberg. In American money, of course.

Now for the real purpose of this letter. I have heard that in Germany the students form fencing clubs and derive great joy in cutting each other in the face. The term for such a cut is a *Schmiss*, I believe. It is considered quite proper in college circles to sport one of these on your face much to the edification of the German girls.

Now what I would like to know, Mr. Fleischer, is something, as much as you can possibly give, about the technicalities of these sword fights. Who fight? All the students or just certain ones? What in Heaven's name do they fight about? How is a duel arranged, etc., etc.? In fact any information or references which you can give me will be appreciated.

Do they teach engineering at Bonn or Heidelberg? Any sciences whatsoever? I may here say that I'm studying civil engineering. How about sports at said universities? Do they give degrees as here? That is A. B. or B. S. or C. E., etc.?

Well, I guess I've given enough for one assignment. Perhaps you've never received a set of questions quite so 'dumb' as this one. In any event, any sort of answer will be gratefully received. I dare say some of the queries are bizarre. Yet you get my general trend—university life in Germany with special emphasis on the dueling."—WILLIAM BACHMANN, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Fleischer:—If every letter received by me would be as explicit as yours and if every inquirer would state his or her questions as clearly as you do, I should be quite easily satisfied. Your letter is by no means "dumb," nor are the questions bizarre.

Sorry to say I am not informed at present whether or not engineering is taught at either Bonn or Heidelberg. Nor do I know the present fee for enrollment. Why not address the U. S. consul at Köln for this information? Neither of these universities has the same reputation as an engineering school as the University of Freiburg.

The Technical University (German) of Prague, Czecho-Slovakia, had at my time the largest number of foreign students enrolled for a technical course. Of course, conditions may have changed, and I confess that I have not followed up these questions since I did not expect to be called upon to answer such.

As far as student life is concerned, I know that it has not changed since I—happy days, where have you gone to?—was also a member of a student body, not in a German city but in Prague. However, although the rules of the game were the same, Austrian students at that time did not go to such extremes as those of the German universities, especially as far as the dueling was concerned.

The student bodies, known as *Burschenschaft*, *Verbindung*, *Korps* and by similar names, have a political origin, dating back to the time of the Wars of Liberty in Napoleonic days. With the passing years this aspect has changed considerably, and the underlying reason for them now is supposed to be a closer union of students in a strange city, who hail from different parts of the country.

There are certain rules and regulations, each union having its own colors, shown on a band worn across the waistcoat and in a cap of varying make and design.

Much has been written in condemnation and defense of the dueling, which in my own opinion is a nuisance. It requires, however, a lot of nerve and self-control to stand up, armed with a sharp saber, against a foe who in all probability will cut your head and face to ribbons. There are some embryo doctors present to sew up the wounds, and it is considered good form to hold still without blinking an eyelash. Wo to the unfortunate who would utter a sound! He would be an outcast forever.

I remember what was called my first *Mensur*. My neck was swathed in bandages, my right arm half covered, my left hand strapped to my back. A *Schläger* (cutter—sword) the guard of which showed the colors of my *Verbindung*, was pressed into my right hand, the seconds took their places, we crossed sword-tips, and off we were. I do not remember much, but after a few passes I managed to draw my sword across my adversary's cheek and it was over. So were my days with the *Verbindung*; I had enough.

You are quite right that these *Schmisse* rank with the German girls on about the same level as bell-shaped trousers, one-button suits, etc., etc., rank with our flappers. Both female contingents, however, are on the same mental plane and have about the same mental capacity. But to tell the truth, the *Schmisse* or scars are very necessary to some faces in order that the owner might not be mistaken for a bartender or a hack-driver.

Dueling is not the only thing these student bodies do. There are drinking bouts—*Commers* as they are called—and the quantities of beer consumed would float the *Leviathan*. That's one side of student life. It costs money, especially if a student belongs to one of the "feudal" corps. Not every student can afford it.

There are of course athletics, and the chief sport has always been soccer. This is the most popular game on the continent and ranks just ahead of tennis. Winter sports are very popular—skating, skiing and the like.

OF COURSE, I have been out of touch with student life for a long time and conditions may have changed considerably. I remember there was always a profound national note about the whole thing; and I forgot to mention the fact that "Jew-baiting" was a very favorite pastime, which speaks volumes for the tolerance of these young gentlemen. A Jew was not even *satisfactionsfähig*, which lengthy word means "unable to give satisfaction." A Jew could not cross swords with a member of these student bodies.

But they were ever ready to break a fight from a fence, as the German saying goes. A cross look, transfixing the other with your eye, a word about a girl, etc.—off they were. Sometimes it was more than ridiculous. All of it was pulled off with such a pompous manner, stiff, solemn.

Mr. Bachmann, you don't know what opportunity you have given me with your letter to enjoy a long, hearty laugh by delving into times gone by—by remembering some incidents and to see the folly, the asinine trend, of it all.

I hope I have told you all that you wanted to know. If I have omitted some—and I have a lot, I know, for reasons—come again.

To this the questioner replied as follows:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

I received your answer to my question today and I can truly say that I never was so pleased with a letter whose purpose was purely informal than I was with yours. If all the question editors of "Ask Adventure" are as thorough in the treatment of their subjects, as pleasantly reminiscent as you, then what a galaxy of talent that department must hold!

However, there is one point on which you and I disagree slightly. Yet stay! I'll wager your attitude is only one of conscious aloofness. You're too old, you think to yourself, to sympathize with such frivolity as *Studenten Fechterei*, etc. Really I don't believe it's asinine. A bit of the opera bouffe, I admit, but so solemn and so sincere. Surely sincerity never was asinine.

I can well imagine how a maturer mind, glorying in its time-acquired mellowness, can look so harshly upon deeds which even so few years ago it gloried in and was proud to defend. But I am only nineteen and I like the old buncombe, if you please. I suppose I'd be all cut up the first week at a German university.

Students must be different, you know. They are told, I am told and was told, that the college man is a superior person, quite aloof from the common horde. Forsooth, they must patronize and support extraordinary things, things which an unsympathetic world calls ——

But, my dear Mr. Fleischer, don't for a moment think that any of my extremely youthful remarks are meant for you. I'd be darned proud of myself if I could step around knowing I've been in a fight such as you were. That is if I were a German born.

And why assail the flappers so? My cousin, a German and a high-school grad, utters such terms as "*prachtvoll*," etc., whenever I talk *Schmiss*. She's got a level head on her shoulders too. Well, I'll not bother you any longer with this nonsense, but will close reminding you that it may be many a long day before I receive a letter which interests me as much as yours did.—WILLIAM BACHMANN.

Reply, by Mr. Fleischer:—It took me a week to make up my mind whether or not to reply to your letter, because I was not quite sure if it warranted one. However, some of your statements are no doubt the result of some impressions which I have failed to correct, and I feel they do need correction.

Even if I were German born—which, by the way, I am not, regardless of my name—I would hardly be proud of the fact that I was once party of the first part in a sword duel. During my nine years as a United States Army regular I went up against other things. I still hold that the circumstance, the ritual, the conversation during the beer-drinking orgies are asinine—but I have not touched in my letter to you upon the ideals which these students hold high, for such explanation was uncalled for and is, within my letter, of no concern.

You are losing your wager. My attitude is everything but one of aloofness. I am very deeply concerned about all things in connection with the German nation, the accomplishments of which, in art and letters, science, etc., I regard very highly. Besides I am not old enough to have lost the enthusiasm of youth—not by a long shot, even if I am some years your senior. My university days are not so far behind me, and the time I lost by not attending students' *Kneip* evenings counts less than the hours I've put in delving into the hidden treasures of the "Edda," the "Niebelungen Lied" and the like.

Yes, we also were told that college students were different. But to make asses of themselves in order to be different is still another matter. It is not so much the thing itself that I dislike; it is the manner in which it was carried out, the utter disregard of the rights of other people, the intolerance savoring of the Middle Ages, and above all the utter ruination of the character of those youngsters who could not afford it and went into debt in order to live up to "reputation." There's a side of it which I did not care to mention, and there are still other sides to this affair which I do not even care to discuss.

With all due respect to your cousin, I was surprized that she did not utter the term *kolossal* instead of *prachtvoll*—since to speak in superlatives was always an accomplishment to the German equivalent of our flappers.

If you have made up your mind to study abroad, take my advice and don't ever forget that you are an American—and—I am sure you will find out that the longer you live abroad, the more thankful you will be for the fact that you are an American.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Hiking in Maine

WILD country that still is almost within arm's reach of civilization:

Request:—"We do not intend to make a permanent camp. Hike each day and sleep outdoors every night. We are coming by auto and have no females with us. This is in Maine.

Our intentions are to store the car; start on the hike. We expect to hike for a period of eight days at the rate of fifteen miles per day average. We do not expect to go on a straight-line route but at the end of the eighth day we expect to finish at our starting-point; that is, we shall make somewhat of a circle.

We would also like you to tell us how much the services of a guide will be for the eight days. Would it be advisable to have a pup tent and sleeping bag or a blanket instead of bag?

For how long a period shall we have to supply ourselves with foodstuffs, or can we buy fresh food each or every other day? What should the approximate weight of our packs be?"—GEORGE HEYMAN, New York.

Reply, by Dr. Hathorne:—Drive to Greenville at the foot of Moosehead Lake; leave car there in good garage accommodations; buy what supplies and outfit are needed at Sanders & Son; take road on east side of lake to Lilly Bay, about fifteen miles; from this point to Ripogenus Dam it is about thirty miles; turn to the left shortly before you get to Ripogenus, and the road will take you to the old site of Chesuncook Dam. Here you can get a launch that makes regular trips up Chesuncook Lake; this will bring you to the little village of Chesuncook. Good hotel accommodations here if you do not care to make camp. From here you can follow the river, the west branch of the Penobscot, to Northeast Carry, about twenty-five miles.

Follow the trail up the river, bringing you to Seeboomook Dam. There is a good automobile road from here to the road that runs from the hotel at Seboomook to the Pittston Farm, about thirteen miles. Shortly before reaching Pittston a road turns to the left that will take you to Rockwood or Kineo Station, the terminus of the Somerset branch of the Maine Central Railroad. A steamer makes daily trips down the lake to Greenville Junction, which is about two miles from the town of Greenville, where your car was stored.

If you wish you can make some change in the above by having some one take your party in a canoe from Chesuncook, paddling up Caucomgomoc stream to lake of same name, and by going up the lake a short paddle you can take a good road that will bring you to Seboomook Dam, a hike of about fifteen miles.

The above roads are all through the Maine wilderness but are as good as any roads to be found in the State. The road from Rockwood runs nearly to the Quebec line; but to reach it by auto one has to take the car up the lake on one of the steamers that run to the head of the lake.

The rates charged by the guides in that vicinity vary somewhat, depending on the kind of work. Most of them had much rather paddle a canoe than walk. On canoe trips their rates are from $5 to $7 per day and expenses. If you do not intend to fish or carry firearms the guide would not be necessary.

You would need to carry supplies for a couple of days only, as you can buy them at several places on the trip. I should say approximately a forty-pound pack would be all you would care to hike with, and all you would need. I should say also that a pup tent with a wool and rubber blanket would answer. If you would like me to find a good guide for you for the trip, let me know.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

An Ontario Outing

WHERE fishermen thrive:

Request:—"A party of either two or four of us are desirous of spending from ten days to two weeks canoeing, camping and fishing at some time during the summer months next year in either northern Michigan or southern Ontario. We have in mind exploring some river tributary or small chain of lakes with a view to building a permanent summer camp in that territory in the near future.

1. What fish are found in this section, and what hunting, if any, is there during the summer?

2. What will it cost to rent a canoe and to provision for a trip of two weeks for two people? What equipment is needed?

3. Can you give us any prospective routes?

4. Would it be possible to find plots of ground where permission to cut trees and erect a cabin would be granted for reasonable lease?

5. Can you give the probable cost of a story and a half log cabin, about twenty-five by fifty feet?

6. What time of the summer is best for such a trip as proposed?"—MERLE C. HARKER, Louisville, Ky.

Reply, by Mr. Moore:—1. The fish in my section of Ontario run all the way from perch to maskinonge. We have speckled and gray trout, black bass, pike, two kinds of pickerel, etc., etc. There is no question about the fishing end of such a trip as you propose, but there is absolutely no hunting of any kind permitted in Ontario during the summer months. Our hunting season, except for ducks, begins in November, and you can have all the fish you can catch in this country at that season of the year, although it is close season for most of them.

2. Can not tell you anything about the rent of a canoe. Think you would be further ahead to look out for a good one cheap and bring it along. Call at customs when you are coming across and leave a bond that you will take it back along with your other equipment when you are going home again. Provisions for two people for a couple of weeks should not cost you more than ten dollars. In fact that is just what it has cost me for a two weeks' deer-hunting outing; and believe me I had everything that any healthy man needs to try his teeth on. Further than that I am going in where it is impossible to buy anything.

As regards equipment: You would need a very light tent, some blankets, ground cloth rubber, changes of clothing; and don't forget to be able to change if you are caught out in the wet. Then of course there are the dishes and an ax and a flashlight and your fishing tackle. Sit down and figure out what you need most in the way of utensils; and don't take more than you require, for the stuff gets heavy on a portage.

3. You could come over to Kingston and go up the Rideau Canal to where it branches off into the innumerable lakes north of that city. Send 15c per sheet to J. E. Chalifour, Chief Geographer, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, Ont., and ask for the Pembroke sheet and the Kingston sheet. Write in to the Department of Lands and Mines, Toronto, and ask for prices on camping sites along these lakes. You buy the land at so much an acre and it is yours; and as I understand it you cut and use whatever timber you own to suit yourself.

4. I could not very well give you the cost of your cabin. It would depend a great deal on how you built it. I would suggest that as far as possible you make it fireproof outside, so as to survive running fires which are continually breaking out in this country.

5. Best time to come over would be after 15th of June when bass, trout, 'lunge and most of the other fish are in season. And don't forget to bring along some good mosquito and black-fly oil.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address J. D. NEWSOM, *Adventure*, New York.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

NOT since the department started have so many good things been contributed as have come in during this past month. After a fruitless attempt to choose from the heap of letters each marked "For print—next issue," I've decided to draw four at random. Here they are, or as much of them as space permits.

"Here," writes J. W. F., "is a song that I heard Jesse James sing. It was tabooed by the old-timers, although some of them were ex-Quantrell men." Does any one know more of it?

Quantrell

(*Contributed by J. W. F.*)

Come, all ye bold robbers, come lend us your ears,
Of Quantrell the rover you quickly shall hear.
With a band of bold raiders in double quick time
He came to burn Lawrence, just over the line.

With routing and shouting and giving the yell,
Just like so many demons of where I won't tell.
They were intoxicated with powder and wine,
And they came to burn Lawrence, just over the line.

They came to burn Lawrence, they came not to stay.
Jim Lane he was up at the break of the day.
He saw them a-coming and got in a fright
And crawled in a corn crib to get out of sight.

With routing and shouting and giving the yell,
Just like so many demons of where I won't tell.
They were intoxicated with powder and wine,
And they came and burned Lawrence, just over the line!

IN ANSWER to my request for information as to the song "Nigger Lost John" comes the following from E. W. H., "as sung in construction camps along the upper Chesapeake." The first two verses belong to the story; the third and fourth are modern additions which have entirely lost sight of the original hero.

Lost John

(*Contributed by E. W. H.*)

Did you ever hear the story 'bout Lost John Dean,
A bold black robber from Bowling Green?
They put him in jail the other day,
And late last night he made his get-away.

Long gone from Kentucky,
Long gone, ain't he lucky,
Long gone, that's what I mean,
He's long gone from Bowling Green.

They sent out a reward to bring him back,
Even put the bloodhounds on his track;
Dog-gone bloodhounds lost the scent,
Now nobody knows where Lost John went.

Lost John went to the burlesque show
Bought himself a seat in the very first row;
When the girls came out to do the shimmy dance
They carried him away in an ambulance.

My wife told me not to stay out late,
To leave the pool room about quarter past eight;
But I stayed out late like a —— —— fool,
And I lost all my money shootin' Kelly pool.

FOUR men, in different sections of the United States, have already expressed their willingness to act as collectors in their districts, and to send in all the material that they can obtain. That strikes me as being a real step forward in our attempt to gather and preserve as much as possible of the older material still passed on from man to man but seldom printed, and I'd be glad to hear from others who might be willing to act in this way either for a local district or for any special type of song.

The following verses of "The Old Chisholm Trail" come from Mr. I. I. Harrison, our District Collector for Arizona. I have multigraphed copies of a much fuller text of this song that I'll be glad to send to any of you who will accompany your request with a contribution of one or more songs for the department.

Hi-Yi-Yippee-Yippee-Yi

(*Contributed by Mr. I. I. Harrison*)

There's a beef in the herd, and the boss said, "Kill it,"
And here comes the cook with the damned old skillet,
Singin' *hi-yi-yippee-yippee-yi!*

My bridle's on my horse, and my rump is in the saddle,
And I'm ridin' all around these long-horned cattle,
Singin' *hi-yi-yippee-yippee-yi!*

My slicker's in the wagon, and I'm gettin' mighty cold,
And these long-horned sons-o'-guns are gettin' hard to hold,
Singin' *hi-yi-yippee-yippee-yi!*

We'll hit Kiowa, and we'll hit her a-flyin'
And we'll bed our cattle on a hill near by an'
Singin' *hi-yi-yippee-yippee-yi!*

Well, I met a little girl, and I offered her a quarter.
But she says, "Young man, I'm a cow-puncher's daughter,"
Singin' *hi-yi-yippee-yippee-yi!*

I dropped my bridle, an' I jumped to the ground,
And I swore by G— that I'd fight all around,
Singin' *hi-yi-yippee-yippee-yi!*

Well, I'll sell my saddle and I'll buy me a plow
And I swear by G— I'll never rope another cow,
Singin' hi-yi-yippee-yippee-yi!

FROM H. A. J. C. of Albany comes an old canal song, which I'm glad to get and to pass on.

Sixteen Years on the Erie Canal
(*Contributed by H. A. J. C.*)

I got an old mule and her name is Sal—
Sixteen years on the Erie Canal—
She's a good old worker and a good old pal—
Sixteen years on the Erie Canal.

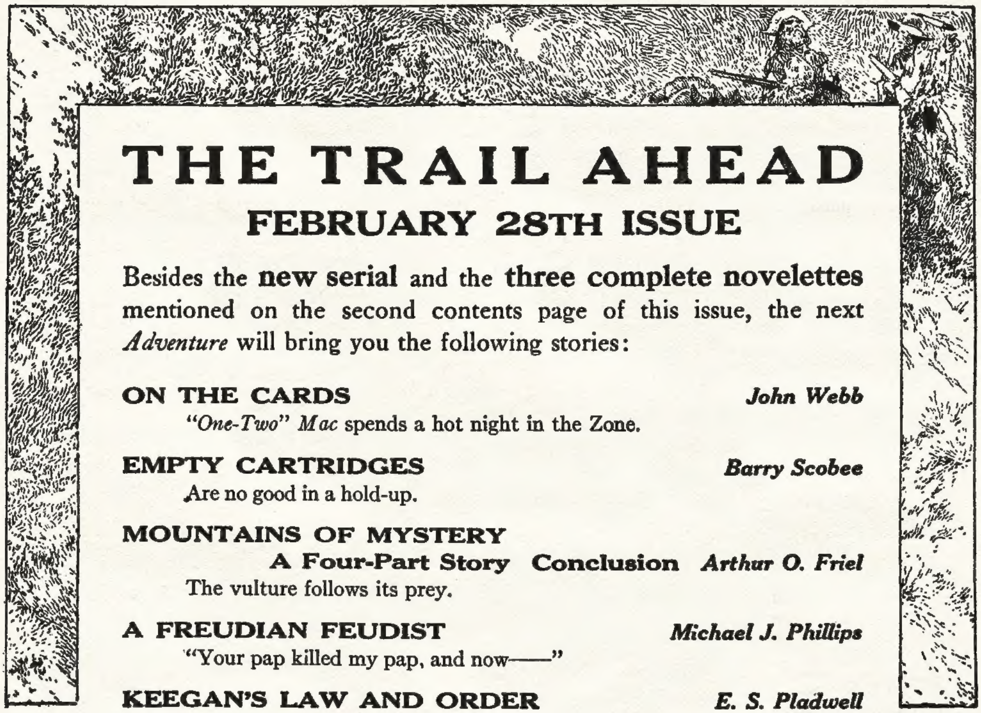
Low bridge, everybody down!
Low bridge, we must be gettin' near a town!
You can always tell your neighbor,
You can always tell your pal,
If he ever navigated on the Erie Canal!

Get up there, Sal, we passed that lock!
We'll make Rome 'fore six o'clock,
One more trip and back we'll go
From Albany to Buffalo.

Low bridge, everybody down! etc.

DON'T forget that other versions of any of the songs printed here are always welcome and are often of great value in our attempt to trace the origin and history of the texts. And if you want to receive a copy of the other verses of "The Old Chisholm Trail" remember to enclose a song as well as a two-cent stamp.

SEND all contributions of songs and all questions in regard to them direct to R. W. Gordon, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts. DO NOT send them to the magazine.



THE TRAIL AHEAD

FEBRUARY 28TH ISSUE

Besides the **new serial** and the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

ON THE CARDS *John Webb*
"*One-Two*" *Mac* spends a hot night in the Zone.

EMPTY CARTRIDGES *Barry Scobee*
Are no good in a hold-up.

MOUNTAINS OF MYSTERY
A Four-Part Story Conclusion *Arthur O. Friel*
The vulture follows its prey.

A FREUDIAN FEUDIST *Michael J. Phillips*
"Your pap killed my pap, and now——"

KEEGAN'S LAW AND ORDER *E. S. Pladwell*
The redskin was too —— stolid.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by W. C. Tuttle, Gordon MacCreagh, William Byron Mowery, Harold Lamb, Leslie McFarlane, John Dorman, Arthur D. Howden Smith, Thomson Burtis and Larry Barretto; and short stories by W. Townend, Eugene Cunningham, F. St. Mars, Rolf Bennett, L. Paul, T. Samson Miller, Walter J. Coburn, Barry Scobee, Douglas Oliver, Ralph R. Perry, G. W. Barrington, Thomas Topham, Alan Le May and others; stories of castaways on desert islands, Russian fur-traders in Alaska, cowboys on the Western range, stokers on the high seas, explorers on the Amazon, cosmographers in Lapland, concession-hunters in Africa, wreckers off Florida, vikings in Norwegian fjords, aviators in the oil country, deputy sheriffs in the Southwest and doughboys on the Western Front.

Will you give me 6 Months to Increase YOUR PAY?

Your name on the coupon means "Yes"

No, I am not a wizard. I don't claim to have a "corner" on success, but here's a fact.

For fourteen years I have been helping men just like you to make more money, not just a few men here and there, but thousands of men.

Think these facts over—in just a few months' time I boosted one man's pay from $2.00 a day to over $300 a month—another now makes as high as $27.00 a day—another man, after securing my help, went into business for himself and, while he now hires his drafting done, he makes over $50,000 a year.

$275 Extra in Three Days

One man saw an ad like this—Sent in the coupon—Enrolled for the Columbia Course—and shortly after he received $275 for one drawing that he made in his spare time in three days.

Do you make money like these men do? Does the money in your pay envelope get you the things you really want or just enough to make you wish you, too, could have the good things of life that other men have—money, independence, success, happiness?

MAKE $50 TO $100 A WEEK

Columbia will train you to be an expert Draftsman in your spare time at home by mail. There's a lot of room for you if you act now. This doesn't mean that you will be just an ordinary Draftsman, but a finished, Professional Draftsman, able to hold your place among the highest paid Draftsmen in the land.

PROMOTION IS QUICK

We'll qualify you for a high salaried position in the Drafting field and keep you in touch with openings for Draftsmen in the big machine shops, industrial plants and United States Government departments. Men who start as Draftsmen are often advanced to Chief Draftsmen, Chief Engineers, Production Managers, and so on. Many of my graduates are today holding such positions as a result of my help. These positions pay big money and lead on to executive positions of the highest type. Thousands of men have found Drafting to be the stepping stone to some of the biggest positions in American industry.

GET THE RIGHT TRAINING

I started this school years ago. Today it is a solidly established nationally known institution, with graduates all over the world. I stand personally in back of the Columbia School of Drafting and back of every promise, every statement we make. You get the right training when you enroll at Columbia. You spend no time on long winded theories. You start on actual drawing work the day you receive your first lesson. You get right down to brass tacks and there is no lost motion, no waste time or effort at any stage of the course. From the very beginning you can feel yourself making progress, the kind of progress that makes you confident of yourself and sure of your success.

YOU NEED NO PREVIOUS TRAINING

This course of mine is easy to understand and easy to follow. It is designed for men who must have the best and who must get the right training quickly, so as to be able to make more money as soon as possible. Many of my students are qualified, even before they complete the course. Many a man has increased his pay so soon after enrolling that his course has actually cost him nothing.

SUCCESS CALLS MEN OF ACTION ONLY

If you are a man of action—if you want success bad enough to reach out and grab it, clip the coupon now and show me that you are a man of action. Keep right on top of this opportunity to make real money. Don't go looking for a pair of scissors, tear the coupon off and mail it right away. Get started now.

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ROY C. CLAFLIN, President
Dept. G-105, 14th and T Sts., N. W.,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

What I Give You

Free Book. Send in the coupon today. I will immediately send you our book "Drafting—Your Success" which tells about Drafting and its opportunities and contains proof that I can raise your pay.

Free Subscription to Drafting Publication "The Compass." I will give you free a subscription to our helpful, inspiring publication "The Compass."

Practical Problems. You will be carefully coached in practical Drafting work.

I Help You Get a Job. I will help you get a position as a practical Draftsman and will give you real, personal help, such as I have given to thousands of others.

Personal Instruction and Supervision, throughout the Course. You will receive the personal instruction and help of Roy C. Claflin, President of the Columbia School of Drafting and a practical Draftsman of many years' experience.

Draftsman's Equipment. I will furnish you with a full set of first class drawing equipment and Drafting instruments, as shown in the picture below, when you enroll. You keep both sets on completing the course.

Consultation Privileges. You are free to write me at any time for personal advice and suggestions regarding your progress.

Diploma. The diploma I will give you on completing the course attests to your proficiency as a Draftsman. It is an entering wedge to success.

Advice Regarding Government Positions. The following are a few of the many positions open in the Government Departments from time to time. The salaries are **starting** salaries, subject to increase:

Architectural Designer — $4,000 a year.
Chief Draftsman, Naval Aircraft Factory—$15.04 a day.
Aeronautical Draftsman, Field Service, Navy Department — $5.20 to $12.50 a day.

We will advise you as to other government openings from time to time.

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Please send me without charge your free illustrated book on Drafting, telling me how I can secure your help in securing a position as Draftsman. Also enter my name for free subscription to "The Compass."

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"The Mating *of* Pompalone"

a new story by
T. S. Stribling

Pompalone—
The savage white man whose fortune was made through lucky murders and robberies; his coat of arms is a tiger rampant.

Lady Bettina—
A strong, ambitious Englishwoman, a fitting mate for "The Magnificent Pompalone."

Sun Yet Lee—
The ironic Chinaman who says, "The white man measures his social progress as a mariner determines his speed; the one heaves over his log, the other his friends."

Najalka—
The beautiful, dainty nautch girl of whom Pompalone says, "she is the goal—life's aristocratic moment."

Rhamba Singh—
The old, mysterious Hindu who changes the lives of them all.

You will want to read this dramatic story by T. S. Stribling, famous author of "Birthright," and you will find it in

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Everybody's
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On sale at every news-stand—25c a copy